

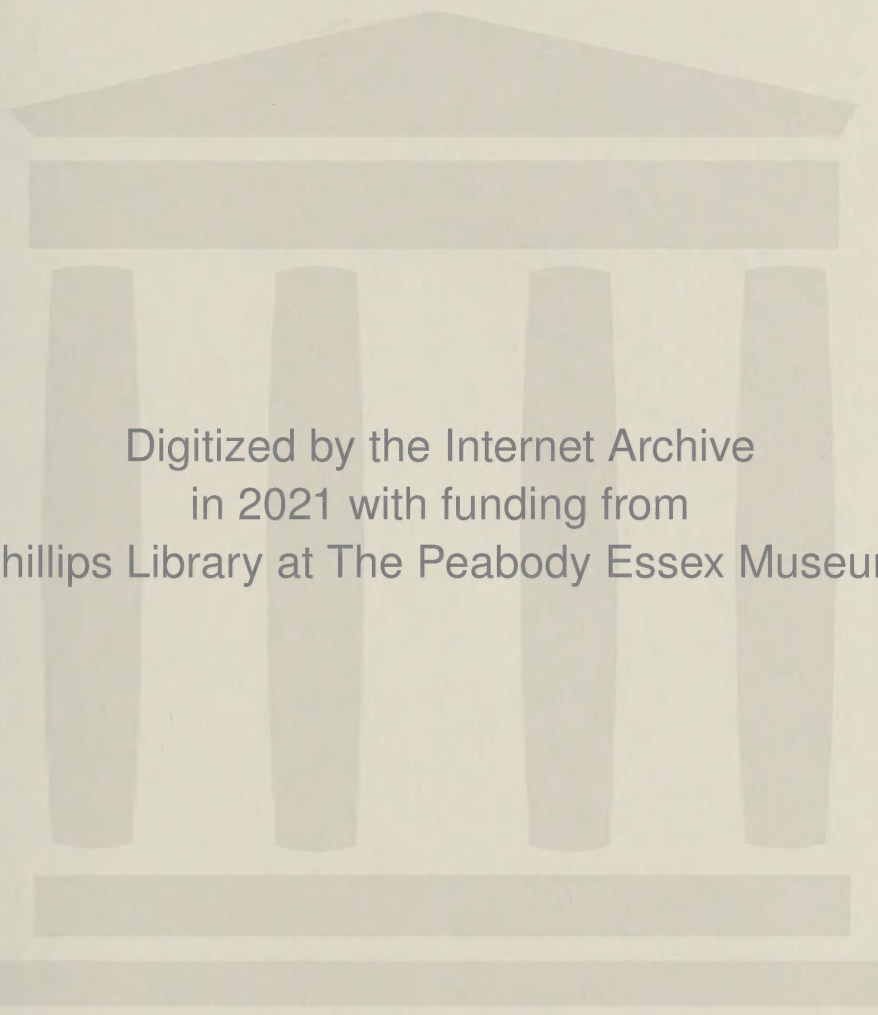


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A NAVAL FIASCO OF  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

BY

Philip Chadwick Foster Smith

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PEABODY MUSEUM OF SALEM

SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

1977



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*Printed by The Anthoensen Press, Portland, Maine*

*Plates by The Meriden Gravure Company  
Meriden, Connecticut*

*This small volume is dedicated  
to the memory of a man who should have written it  
the author's great-great-great grandfather  
Benjamin Henderson (1761-1836) of Salem*

who enlisted in the Continental Army on 1 July 1775, took part in the siege of Boston, the battles of Long Island, White Plains, Harlem Heights, crossed the Delaware to fight at Trenton, and then tired of army life. Heading home to New England, he stole enough clothing off a passing clothesline to hide his nakedness and in February 1777 entered on board the Continental frigate *Boston* where he was assigned to the larboard watch and gun number 1, across the sights of which he saw H.M. frigates *Fox*, *Flora*, and *Rainbow* for himself.

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Plates *between 54-55*



## Introduction

**T**HIS PUBLICATION is occasioned by four oil paintings commissioned in 1779 and acquired by the Peabody Museum of Salem in 1976. For one hundred and eighty-five of the intervening years they had been totally unknown to the public and to naval historians alike. The event they depict took place in mid-summer 1777. A frigate of the American Continental Navy turned tail before an inferior British force while a second was captured. The repercussions endured for years.

Except within the minds of those in 1777 who chose to take sides, the blame for it all was never clear-cut; nor is it even now. Nevertheless, after the passage of so many years, the strange behavior of the two American captains, if yet puzzling in many respects, can be viewed from a perspective that was impossible to achieve in their own time.

Perhaps, for the enlightenment of an inquiring posterity, if for no other reason, it is fortunate that British cannon proved supreme on that July day of 1777, because otherwise the four canvases would never have been painted and would not now be ours to unveil.

P. C. F. S.

Salem, Massachusetts  
December 1976





Fired by Manley Zeal



## Two Captains

---

AT THE END OF May 1777, two American frigates in company put to sea from Boston Harbor on their maiden cruise. In command were the second and third ranking officers of the Continental Navy—one an ascetic emigré from south Devon, the other a volatile Irish-born Scot. Both men were veteran mariners of the merchant trades; each in times past had seen service of one kind or another with the Royal Navy; each had impressed the Marine Committee of the Continental Congress as resourceful, courageous captains absolutely deserving of the commands they now held.

John Manley and Hector McNeill were men of strong passions and immodesty. They heartily disliked each other.

A contemporary observer, thinking back more than thirty years, compared the two even as they sailed to British admirals Thomas Mathews and Richard Lestock, whose mutual contempt had led to the naval fiasco in the Mediterranean at the turn of the years 1743/44 and the courts-martial, bickering, and abuse that ensued.<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the cruise of Manley and McNeill in 1777 were not the same, but many of the effects were similar—trials, recriminations, loss of

honor and reputation, and public sentiment outraged.

After two hundred years or more it is extremely difficult to point fingers in specific directions. Manley's voice was muted from his prison cell while McNeill remained at large to circulate his side of the story. One was acquitted while the other was cashiered from the service.

As for the two principal British captains involved, both were tough professionals, for more than twenty years steeped in the traditions of the Royal Navy and destined ultimately for high flag rank. Each would have been expected in the natural course of events to account well for himself in any single ship action. Together, pitted against a force of equal strength, there would have been very little official doubt as to the outcome. But, long naval experience or no, if they were outmanned or outgunned the tip of the scales would probably be reversed.

When John Manley and Hector McNeill were engaged by Captain John Brisbane and Captain Sir George Collier on 7-8 July 1777 they were in command not only of their own frigates but also of one other they had captured. Thus, it was three ships against two, but, because Manley and McNeill hated each other, the British emerged victorious anyway.



John Manley is one of those enigmatic figures in history whom historians time after time have never quite managed to pin down, for even though many of the effects of his career are well enough known most of their causes are not.

To date, his life has been the subject of two short bi-

ographies, but neither agrees about his origin.<sup>2</sup> One suggests he was born in Boston and married there and the other that he came to America from the shores of Tor Bay in southwest England. To confuse matters even further, there survives a legend to the effect that after his settlement in New England, Manley married under the name of John Russell at Marblehead, where numerous (presumed) descendants of that surname lived for generations afterwards.

When witnesses were questioned and statements taken by British authorities over the loss to Manley (and then the recapture from him) of the English frigate *Fox*, a fishing skipper who had been taken prisoner by Manley was asked:

“How do you know it was Captain Manley that commanded the American privateer?” To which the witness replied:

“He told me he was born at Merrychurch near Dartmouth. I then recollected that I knew many of his family. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Parish registers prove this statement. John, son of Robert Manley, was baptized in the church of St. Marychurch village on the outskirts of Torquay on 18 August 1732. By way of confirmation, a letter published in the *Exeter* [England] *Flying Post* of 17 October 1777 from a lieutenant aboard H.M.S. *St. Albans* at New York to a brother in Exeter speaks of Manley, “the rebel commodore,” and says that “he was born at Torkey near Torbay and that he has a brother and sister living at St. Marychurch now.”<sup>4</sup>

Like most men raised to lofty positions, Manley had his



share of detractors. The ever-critical John Paul Jones was among them and never failed to take the side of his good friend McNeill. From him we know that Manley had served in the Royal Navy. "He had lately the Honor," Jones fumed at the beginning of 1777, "of being a Stick officer Vulgarly Called Boatswains Mate in an English Man of War and was duely Qualified for that heigh Station, if Fame Says true as appears by his not Deigning to Read English."<sup>5</sup>

Such vitriolic comments were hardly fair, while the sarcastic implication that Manley was an illiterate is justifiable only to the extent that, because so few of his papers survive, he seems to have had a strong aversion to setting pen upon paper. Other characterizations by Jones were equally nasty. Taken as a whole, however, they serve to illustrate the factions that had grown up around Manley and McNeill even before the start of their ill-fated cruise.

Not long before, Manley had been a hero: the subject of a patriotic broadside song printed at Salem and the recipient of numerous well-deserved accolades. "You no doubt have heard of Captain Manly, who goes in a privateer out of this harbor," a resident of Beverly had written to a correspondent just before Christmas 1775, "because his name is famous, and as many towns contend for the honour of his birth as there did for that of Homer's."<sup>6</sup>

Whether Manley first settled at Marblehead after coming to the Colonies or removed thence from Boston after the British closed the port in June 1774 is not known, but he was certainly in that vicinity during the late summer of 1775 when he was recommended to George Washing-

ton and his staff by Major General Israel Putnam as an able sea officer. In October, he was commissioned to command the armed schooner *Lee*, one of several Marblehead schooners hired by Washington during the last quarter of the year to cruise against British supply ships entering Massachusetts Bay. "At the Continental expense," Washington told Virginia's Richard Henry Lee on the twenty-seventh of November, "I have fitted out six,<sup>7</sup> as by the enclosed list, two of which are upon the cruise directed by Congress; the rest ply about Cape Cod and Cape Ann, as yet to very little purpose."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, during the first weeks of the autumn cruises, small returns upon an investment of hope had been realized. Of fourteen vessels taken by the schooners between 29 October and 27 November 1775, not one carried anything of especial value to improve either Washington's strategic position or to withhold warlike supplies from the British occupying forces in Boston. Every one, in fact, had been an improper prize, a recapture, or one subject to litigious dispute.

Even though Washington's suspicions were only just beginning to form, it looked as if two of his captains, Nicholson Broughton and John Selman of Marblehead, had broken orders to go off on a binge of their own. None of the prizes they were sending in was a legitimate one or was in any way connected with their orders from Congress to intercept two inbound British ordnance brigs at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. Eventually, it would become known that Broughton and Selman had failed to make contact so, instead, had raided the island of St. John

(Prince Edward Island) without authority and had kidnapped its acting Governor. Their disgrace and dismissal would come later. In the meantime, Washington's uneasiness about his fleet was confined to cautious remarks about its present lack of success.

Within two days of so describing it, however, its history of cruising "to very little purpose" was overturned by the capture off Massachusetts Bay of the ordnance brig *Nancy*, from the Thames bound for Boston, laden with mortars, cannon, muskets, ball, shot, carcass bombs, and cartridges. This windfall for the Continental Army had been due solely and completely to John Manley.

During the months immediately following, his reputation was to be enhanced by one success after another. Inexorably, they would lead him toward a captaincy in the newly forming Continental Navy and the beginnings of his abrasive relationship with Hector McNeill.



McNeill's rise came about in an entirely different and less spectacular manner. Five years Manley's senior, he had been born in 1728 in a small village on the seacoast of northern Ireland, not far from the Giant's Causeway between Coleraine and Ballycastle in County Antrim. Three-quarters Scottish and one-quarter Irish, he inherited the fierce spirit of both peoples, took pride in his mother's name of Stuart, his grandfather McNeill's West Highland ancestry, and came heartily to resent the other quarter part of his blood.<sup>9</sup>

At eight years of age, in 1737, his family emigrated with

him to America, and after a storm-tossed passage arrived at Boston to a "not verey Sympathetick" reception. Almost at once, the Boston boys set about to provoke little Hector, whose pronunciation and alien mannerisms caused them great mirth. One succeeded admirably by calling him Irish. "The word was scarcely out of his mouth," McNeill later wrote, "before he had my little fist—dab—in his Eyes. A Battle ensued and he was beaten most unmercyfully. . . . For dureing the whole time of my Boy-hood in the town of Boston my life was one continual State of warfare . . . for my Nature abhorr'd quarleing and contention all my days, but I was drove into that kind of Life, by the incivility and barbarous Partiality; of these People, among whom I was obliged to spend my time."

From this, one can begin to understand the source of Hector McNeill's adult personality as well as of his professional disposition. Firmly loyal to his God, his family, and his friends, he was nevertheless an opinionated, outspoken individual not to be put down, particularly by anyone he considered his inferior.

Ever hopeful of dissuading him from a life at sea, his parents were permitted no peace until he had been given his head; so, finally, at sixteen years of age, he was allowed to ship out in a Boston merchantman. The majority of boys in his day had made their first voyages at a tenderer age by four or five years, yet, despite his late start, McNeill's elevation from the musty depths of the forecandle to the dignity of the quarterdeck was irresistible. At twenty-one, he "was made master of a Vessell in a Verrey Snug trade, and [had] constant Employ."

His subsequent history is very nearly as elusive as John Manley's at the same period, but not quite. He married twice in Boston, once in 1750 and again in 1770, bearing the brunt in the meantime of a succession of family sicknesses and deaths, yet, betimes, pursuing his "snug trade" as master of John Winniet's sloop *Eagle* and schooner *Lawrence*, which hauled provisions from Boston to the Fort Anne garrison at Annapolis Royal on the Bay of Fundy.<sup>10</sup>

In April 1755, *Lawrence* was taken up into the King's service as one of the transports required to carry Major General Robert Monckton's New England expeditionary force against Fort Beauséjour, but, later the same year, she was overrun and captured by Indians just east of Passamaquoddy Bay. Taken prisoner, McNeill was marched overland to Quebec, cursing his companions for "theire stupid neglect [which] betrayd me into the present delima" and the Indians for being "a Cruel Bloody Bigoted Cowardly race of Vermine." It is miraculous that he was not hatcheted en route and left dangling high among the pines in pieces.

How or when he either escaped or secured his release is uncertain. In all likelihood, it came about before Quebec was wrested from French control during the summer campaign of 1759. Some twenty years later, beset by the after-shock of his and Manley's naval fiasco, he was to explain his earlier naval experience to the President of the Continental Congress: "... my Ability as an officer had been Acknowledged by the best sea officers, Viz Admirals Boscawen, Saunders, Durrell, and Colvil[le], under each of



whom I had served as Commander of an Arm'd Vessell of war, and I flatter my Self Should have been Rewarded with a better Ship, had not my Superior Atachment to this country withdrawn me from that service."

The term "armed vessel of war" is, of course, an extremely ambiguous one—deliberately so, perhaps, in view of the pressing circumstances for self-justification. The inference of commissioned service in the Royal Navy is obvious, yet it is necessary to conclude from the lack of evidence to the contrary that McNeill's vessel was probably little more than one of the many armed sloops, schooners, or brigs requisitioned by the Navy to perform ancillary duties during the reduction of French Canada.

Nevertheless, by midsummer 1760, McNeill had become owner and captain of the Boston brig *Alexander* upon a merchant passage to Gibraltar. Little else is known of him for several more years, during which time, perhaps, he broadened his naval connections, but after the end of the French and Indian War he was restored to the coasting trade between Boston and points Down East.

By the time the Revolutionary War erupted in 1775, McNeill was living with his wife and daughters in Quebec, whither he returned from a voyage to Dominica in August 1775. His son, Hector, Jr., however, had remained behind in New England where he became a member of Captain Nicholson Broughton's company of Colonel John Glover's Marblehead regiment.

On 24 November 1775, exactly one week after Broughton and Selman had raided the island of St. John and five days before John Manley's triumphant capture of the



ordnance brig *Nancy*, the elder McNeill departed Quebec. The American army under Colonel Benedict Arnold, which had performed its incredible march to Quebec through the wilderness of Maine, had withdrawn from before the city to Point aux Tremble, twenty miles upriver, there to regroup and await the arrival of Brigadier General Richard Montgomery's reenforcements from Montreal. In the meantime, British Governor General Sir Guy Carleton issued a proclamation to the residents of Quebec. All who refused to bear arms in its defense must be gone within four days or suffer the consequences to their persons and property.

Hector McNeill repaired with his family to Point aux Tremble where they were to remain throughout the winter.

## A Marshalling of Forces

MANLEY'S CAPTURE of the brig *Nancy* in late November 1775 became the turning point of his career and was also the beginning of the metamorphosis that transformed Washington's fleet from a dismal experiment into a successful venture.

"Captain Manlys good fortune seems to Stick to him," wrote one of Washington's staff officers on the thirteenth of December. "He has taken three valuable Prizes since my last [letter] this shews of what vast advantage to the Cause, these Vessels would be, if the Commanders were all as attentive to their duty and interest as Manly is."<sup>1</sup>

*Nancy* no sooner had been secured in Gloucester harbor, with neighboring militia units standing guard over her cargo, than Manley resumed his cruise. Within three days, he was escorting another captured ship into Beverly harbor. Six more days passed, and two further prizes lay rubbing against Beverly's wharves, each taken by the same ruse—Manley's pretense that *Lee* was a British tender from Boston. A further week and a day went by when, on 17 December, a Marblehead rigger arose, yawned, peered blearily through his rain-spotted window, and discovered Manley at anchor in Marblehead harbor with yet another prize under his guns.



# MANLY A FAVORITE NEW SONG,

In the AMERICAN FLEET.  
Most humbly Addressed to all the JOLLY TARS who are fighting  
for the RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of AMERICA.

By a SAILOR.—It may be sung to the Tune of WASHINGTON.

**B**RAVE MANLY he is stout, and his Men have proved true;  
By taking of those English Ships, he makes their Jacks to rue;  
To our Ports he sends their Ships and Men, let's give a hearty Cheer  
To him and all those valiant Souls who go in Privateers.

And a Privateering we will go, my Boys, my Boys,  
And a Privateering we will go.

O all ye gallant Sailor Lads, don't never be dismay'd,  
Nor let your Foes in Battle ne'er think you are afraid,  
Those dastard Sons shall tremble when our Cannon they do roar,  
We'll take, or sink, or burn them all, or them we'll drive on Shore.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

Our Heroes they're not daunted when Cannon Balls do fly,  
For we're resolv'd to conquer, or bravely we will die;  
Then rouse all you New-England Oaks, give MANLY now a Cheer,  
Likewise those Sons of Thunder who go in Privateers.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

Their little petty Pirates our Coast shall ne'er infest,  
We'll catch their sturdy Ships, Boys, for those we do like best;  
Then enter now my hearty Lads, the War is just begun,  
To make our Fortunes at their Cost, we'll take them as they run.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

While *Shuddern* he is flying from WASHINGTON's strong Lines,  
Their Troops and Sailors run for fear, and leave their Stores behind;  
Then rouse up, all our Heroes, give MANLY now a Cheer,  
Here's a Health to hardy Sons of Mars who go in Privateers.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

They talk of Sixty Ships, Lads, to scourge our free-born Land,  
If they send out Six Hundred we'll bravely them withstand;  
Resolve we thus to conquer, Boys, or bravely we will die,  
In fighting for our Wives and Babes, as well as LIBERTY.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

While HOPKINS he is trimming them upon the Southern Shore  
We'll scour our Northern Coast, Boys, as soon as they come o'er,  
Then rouse up, all my Hearties, give Sailor Lads a Cheer,  
Brave MANLY, HOPKINS, and those Tars who go in Privateers.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

I pray you Landsmen enter, you'll find such charming Fun,  
When to our Ports by Dozens their largest Ships they come;  
Then make your Fortunes now, my Lads, before it is too late,  
Defend, defend, I say defend an INDEPENDENT STATE.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

While the Surf it is tossing and Cannon Balls do fly,  
We surely will our Foes subdue, or cheerfully will die,  
Then rouse, all you bold Seamen, brave MANLY's COMMODORE,  
Should we meet with our desperate Foes, bless us, they will be tore.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

Then cheer up, all my hearty Souls, to Glory let us run,  
Where Cannon Balls do rattle, with sounding of the Drum;  
For who would Cowards prove, or even stoop to Fear,  
When MANLY he commands us in our bold PRIVATEER.

And a Privateering we will go, &c.

SALAM: Printed and Sold by B. K. & Co. — Upper End of Market Street.

"Manly is truly our hero of the sea."<sup>2</sup> This, and similar laurels of praise were to be heaped upon him from all sides as the leaves of a New England autumn drift through the air in a multitude of colorful hues. Over the course of time, the brilliancy of autumn leaves must inevitably fade, but for the moment, at least, John Manley's future seemed brighter than ever.

As the autumn cruises ended and the enlistments began to run out, the four schooners were hauled up at Beverly for repairs. Of their commanding officers, only Manley had displayed the courage, imagination, and singleness of purpose demanded by Washington. Obviously, more than just the schooners required an overhaul.

Both Nicholson Broughton and John Selman were abruptly dropped. Winborn Adams, the fourth captain, whose record had never been noteworthy, returned silently to the Continental Army from which he had come and was best suited. The lieutenants and two of the four sailing masters quit en masse, leaving one of the latter who remained to become a lieutenant and the other, William Burke, to be elevated to the command of the schooner *Warren*. Samuel Tucker of Marblehead and Daniel Waters of Malden were appointed to replace Broughton and Selman. As events would demonstrate, the fleet's starting lineup for 1776 was an auspicious one: all four men, Manley, Tucker, Waters, and Burke, ultimately would receive commissions in the Continental Navy. Two of them—Manley and Tucker—would command frigates.



On the thirteenth of December 1775, the same day Manley's good fortune was being eulogized by Washington's staff officer, the Continental Congress at Philadelphia authorized a true naval establishment, calling for the construction of thirteen frigates—five of thirty-two guns, five of twenty-eight, and three of twenty-four—to be built throughout the Colonies and fitted for the sea by early spring 1776.



Meanwhile, in England, three frigates destined a year and a half later to figure in the Manley-McNeill episode began outfitting to deal with the American insurrection.<sup>3</sup>

The first, from the point of view of their initial contact with Manley and McNeill, was H.M. frigate *Fox*, a sixth rate of twenty-eight guns and 180 men, commissioned at Portsmouth on 21 October 1775 under the command of Captain Patrick Fotheringham.

The second was H.M. frigate *Rainbow*, a fifth rate of forty-four guns and 280 men, originally intended as a replacement for one of the three sixty-four-gun station ships at Boston now deemed too large for their purpose. She was commissioned at Sheerness on 27 December 1775, Captain Sir George Collier in command.

The third was H.M. frigate *Flora*, another fifth rate of thirty-two guns and 220 men, originally the French *Vestale* captured on 8 January 1761 by Captain Joseph Hunt of H.M. ship *Unicorn* and purchased into the Royal Navy. *Flora* was commissioned for service in America at Deptford, Captain John Brisbane commanding, on 4 December 1775.

Commissioning by no means signified a readiness for sea orders. Weeks or months of outfitting, provisioning, recruitment, and arming would be required beforehand. *Flora*, the first of the three to reach the colonies actually in revolt, would not arrive off their shores before the latter part of June 1776.



While Hector McNeill at Point aux Tremble was offering Benedict Arnold a loan of cash to help sustain the American army before Quebec,<sup>4</sup> George Washington's schooners went cruising again. Manley, probably the first out and now in command of the schooner *Hancock*, was not yet aware that Washington had settled upon him the responsibilities of fleet commodore. "I wish," the General informed him later, "you Coud inspire the Captains of the other Armed schooners under your Command with Some of your activity & Industry—Cannot you appoint Such Stations for them, where they May have the best Chance of intercepting Supplies going to the enemy they dare not disobey your orders, as it is Mentioned in the instructions [of 20 January 1776] I have given to each of them, that they are to be under your Command, as Comodore & as Such I desire that you will give them Such Instructions in writing as to you will appear proper for the good of the Service."<sup>5</sup>

The designation "commodore" in American naval usage from the Revolution to the Civil War conferred no actual rank upon the bearer. It was an unofficial, honorary title in recognition of the command responsibilities of the senior captain in a squadron consisting of two or more



vessels. Once applied, it rarely came unstuck. Manley was known as "Commodore" for the rest of his life. So was Samuel Tucker, who assumed his duties after Manley left the fleet in May.

His resignation, however, was still some months away, but the seed had been planted even while the schooners were refitting during the first half of January. Flushed with success and by no means immune to the outpourings of public praise, Manley began to have second thoughts about the suitability of his cruiser. *Hancock* was the largest of the four schooners, to be sure, yet she was of only seventy-two tons burthen (making her considerably less than sixty feet in length on deck) and mounted nothing much better than popguns: six four-pound carriage guns and ten swivels. And what of the recent news from Philadelphia about the construction of thirteen frigates for a Continental Navy? He made it clear to Washington he could do with a more substantial vessel.

"Your general good behavior since you first engaged in the Service," Washington replied, "Merits Mine, & your Countrys thanks. You may be assured that every attention will be paid to any reasonable request of yours, & that you shall have the Comand of a Stronger vessel of War, but as it will take up Some time before Such a one Can be fitted out, my desire is, that you Continue in the *Hancock*, until the end [of the] Cruize. When that is out you will Come to Head qrs & we will Confer together in the subject of the other ship."<sup>6</sup>

By the time the cruise was up at the end of April, much had happened. The four schooners, augmented in Febru-

ary by a fifth, had captured another seven vessels, two of which the Commodore himself had been wholly responsible for. *Hancock* had been chased ashore off Cohasset by H.M. brig *Hope* and had sunk in shallow water, but within a matter of days had been refloated. Washington's batteries had begun a bombardment of Boston, and the British had evacuated. As convoys of a hundred sail or more at a time spread out across the extent of the horizon in their retreat toward Halifax, the Commodore with his four ferrets nipped at their heels in attempts to pluck out the stragglers.

Manley would not have the opportunity at the end of the cruise to confer with the General on "the subject of the other ship," because in early April Washington had removed his headquarters from Cambridge to New York. Poor Manley! The rise from boatswain's mate to Commodore had been almost too much for his composure to bear. Vanity! Pride! Swagger!

The Commodore resigned his commission in Washington's Navy upon receipt of the news in early May that on the seventeenth of April 1776 the Continental Congress at Philadelphia had heeded his advances and by ballot had appointed him captain of one of the two frigates then building at Newburyport for the Continental Navy.



The two Newburyport frigates would become known as *Hancock* (not to be confused with Washington's schooner of the same name), thirty-two guns, and *Boston*, twenty-four, although at the time of Manley's appointment to the

frigate *Hancock* neither vessel had been named. Both were well along in construction by then—remarkably well, in fact, considering that the builders had been asked to do the impossible.

In authorizing the construction of thirteen frigates, the Congress seemed to expect them to spring full-blown from the ground overnight, like fairy mushrooms at a full moon. Three and a half months were presumed sufficient to design, build, and outfit the ships for sea. They would not be.

The problems were enormous: there was no well-oiled machinery to oversee the work in progress at the building sites; no fast or reliable communications between Congress and the shipyards; an appalling lack of the most essential naval stores; a chronic shortage of funds; and so on. The list was virtually endless and was always compounded by the fact that the ships were building in yards all the way from Maryland to New Hampshire.

Atop the existing administrative heap was, of course, the full Continental Congress. Under it was created a Marine Committee (which shortly replaced the old Naval Committee) consisting of one member from each colony and charged with the task of carrying the resolve into effect. Below the Marine Committee, Navy Agents in the various colonies negotiated contracts, attempted to resolve problems of logistics, and accounted for the monies received or expended on behalf of the Continent. John Hancock represented Massachusetts on the Marine Committee while Thomas Cushing assumed the burdens of Navy Agent back home.

It was the intention of the Congress, in order to assure a uniformity of design, that drafts for the three classes of frigates be prepared in Philadelphia for dispatch to the builders. Mentioned frequently by historians in connection with the master plans is the name of Joshua Humphreys, who much later became the first United States Naval Constructor, but so many doubts exist as to the extent of his influence over these plans that the architect is still very much a matter for conjecture. Many of the ships, however, particularly those built in New England, departed in many respects from the original drawings so it is probable that no two were built exactly alike.<sup>7</sup>

The drafts were laid before the Marine Committee during the evening of 12 January 1776, when they were approved. Already, one of the three and a half months had been consumed by the preparation of the master drawings alone. Even more time would be required before copies could be drawn and delivered. Some of the New England contractors were not waiting, but were going ahead on their own. "I have got no Draught of the Ship as yet," the agent for the New Hampshire frigate wrote to Philadelphia toward the end of February, "but, we are going on with one of our own Drawing, by the Dimentions which I bro't down . . . don't Cramp my Genius, and the ship shall be Launched soon."<sup>8</sup>

About the middle of January, Thomas Cushing began to investigate the possible building sites for the Massachusetts ships and found general agreement that Newburyport at the mouth of the Merrimack River in northern Essex County, afforded the most nearly ideal conditions.

Boston, of course was out of the question because it was still occupied by the British, while Salem, the only other reasonable alternative within Massachusetts Bay, was exposed to attack by enemy frigates patrolling the bay against the activities of Washington's schooners. In any case, Newburyport had much to recommend it. Not only was there a vast timber reserve from the 110-mile length of the Merrimack and the forests behind it, but established shipyards, together with their attendant trades, existed in profusion from Newburyport all the way up-river to Haverhill. Of no less importance was the fact that the river had produced an extensive sandbar at the entrance of the harbor. Local mariners knew perfectly well how to cross it, but an enemy raiding party would have considerable difficulty doing so and would forfeit the element of surprise in the attempt.

By the twentieth of January 1776, Cushing was fairly sure he would contract with the Cross brothers—Stephen and Ralph—for the smaller frigate and with Jonathan Greenleaf for the other. Meanwhile, the Crosses and Greenleaf already were laying their groundwork at Newburyport. "I hope," Cushing wrote to John Hancock, "to hear from you soon with further directions and also the drafts of the Vessells, let me know the size of the Timber & the Thickness of the plank, pray be as particular in your directions as possible." A quantity of cash, he insisted, would be wanted "immediately in order to proceed upon this Affair with Expedition."<sup>9</sup>

The official drafts for the Massachusetts and New Hampshire frigates were ready for transmission from Phil-



adelphia on the second of February, but they proved so large and awkward that they could not be trusted to any conventional means of conveyance. Another two and a half weeks were to slip by before they were finally sent forward under the care of a courier, Colonel John Bull, who also carried with him \$25,000 in cash for Cushing as well as other funds for the use of the Continental Army. Bull reported to Washington at his Cambridge headquarters during the evening of 25 February. At last, matters were beginning to move, but it was now obvious that none of the frigates could even be launched, let alone be outfitted for sea, by the end of March.

Cushing, who was becoming more and more frustrated over the delays, had written anxiously to Hancock the day before the arrival of the courier: "Eighty or A hundred men are now impatiently waiting for the plans or drafts Hope they will be here in a few days—as we cannot proceed without them—" He needed money, as well: £3,200 for hemp, £2,500 to pay the builders on account, at least £500 for sailcloth, and £200 for iron.

The contract for the frigates *Hancock* and *Boston* was signed on the first of March and because of its uniqueness is worth reproducing in full.

ARTICLES of Agreement made this First day of march 1776. Between the Honble Thomas Cushing Esqr. of Dedham. on the one part and Jonathn Greenleaf, Stephen Cross, and Ralph Cross of Newbury port shipwrights on the Other part. Witnesseth, That the Said Jonathan Stephen & Ralph hath Agreed with the Said Thomas to build with the utmost dispatch in Newbury port Aforesaid two Ships for the Account of the Thirteen United Colonies. Agreeable to the Draughts & Directions which the Said



Thomas hath Deliver'd them, viz. The Length of the keel of the one Ship About Ninety six feet. Breadth of Beam About Thirty three feet Depth in the Hold About Ten feet six Inches. Between decks about four feet Six Inches, the Waist five feet. The Length of the keel of the other Ship About One hundred & eleven feet Breadth of Beam About thirty five feet, depth in the Hold about Eleven feet, depth Between Decks About five feet & five feet waist, the Said Ships to be built as near as possible to the draughts & directions Above mentioned & Referr'd to And the timber and plank to be of the best white oak, and free of Rots and defects, except in the bottom where they have Liberty to put some black Oak timber Only, And the decks which are to be Laid with good pine plank the Scantlens of timber and thickness of plank to be agreeable to the Directions Above Referr'd to, To find and make a Compleat Set of masts, Yards, Bowsprit. Topmasts and top gallant masts The main and fore mast of each ship to be Cheek'd with Oak in a good and workmanlike manner, to build a head & Galleries to each Ship. to find and make two Capstons to each Ship to fix & Step two pumps which work by hand in each Ship to find and fix a Sufficient number of Belaying Bitts, To find and fix Suitable pillars to all the Beams above and Below To find and fix a Rudder and Tiller to each Ship. to find & fix five Anchor Stocks for each Ship. To find Sufficient Stuff for the Companions & all the gangway and Other Ladders. To Caulk the Ships. To find & fix all the Stocks for the Swivel Guns. To find & Fix Seven pair Standards between decks and pointers over the transoms Aft in a word to do and find all the Carpenters work in the finishing them off as a Ship of War Ought to be finished in a Good and Workmanlike manner, And to Launch Said Ships Safely a float the Small Ship [*Boston*] in May the Large Ship [*Hancock*] in June 1776 And the said Jonathan, Stephen & Ralph Agree Allso to Stop all the Worm holes to Clear the timbers and hold of all the Chips, to pay both Ships with Turpentine to Grave both Ships After Launching., to Water both ships on the Stocks, to find

Rum for the Labourers and to Launch Said Ships at their own Risque and Expence, And the Said Thomas Cushing Esqr. on his part doth also Agree with the Said Jonathan Stephen & Ralph that he will find for building the two Ships Afresaid and in Season. Iron work of every kind. pitch. Tar, turpentine, Oackum Joiners Work proper tackles to Assist them and all such Articles as are Customary of the owners to find and do, And pay to the Said Jonathan. Stephen & Ralph at the Rate of Six pounds ten shillg L Money p tun for each & every tun the Large Ship shall measure And Six pounds of Lake money for each & every tun the smaller Ship may measure, the payments to be made in the following manner viz one fourth part When the keel is Laid, one fourth when shut in under the Whale one fourth when the Gun Deck Beams are Carried in one eight part when Launch'd the Remaining Eight part when finished. To the true and faithfull performance of each and every Article before mentioned the parties bind and Oblige themselves each to the Other in the penal sum of Two Thousand pounds Law[ful] money. In Wittness whereof we have hereunto interchangably set our hands and Seals the day & year first above written

Signed Sealed & delivered

in presence of

JOHN BRADFORD

GIBBINS SHARP

JONATH GREENLEAF [Seal]

STEPN CROSS [Seal]

RALPH CROSS JUNR [Seal]

THOMAS CUSHING [Seal]<sup>10</sup>

It is not known to what extent, if any, the Newburyport contractors set to work on the vessels in anticipation of a signed contract. Even though the New Hampshire ship builders had jumped the gun and the Rhode Islanders, too, had one of their frigates in frame before receipt of the drafts, it seems likely that Greenleaf and the Crosses had done little more than to marshal their forces.

By early March, the exchanges between Cushing and

Hancock had become increasingly frequent and urgent. Wrote Hancock on the sixth: “. . . *inter nos* some *here* who are not very friendly to you & I . . . begin publickly to Say that the Massachusetts Ships will be the last finish'd, that they are in no forwardness, &c, I want to Counteract them, in order to which you must Exert yourself, & I must Repeat to you, that no Emolument to any particular person must prevent the ordering as many people as can possibly attend, Dispatch & not profit is the Object, & pray attend to this Night & Day.”<sup>11</sup>

His agitation prompted more the following day: “I now Beg you will Set every Wheel in Motion, employ every Man that can be usefull in the different Branches, procure every Necessary that can be obtain'd with you, the Deficiencies Acquaint me of, & I will Endeavour to Supply them from hence, in short Exert every Nerve to promote Dispatch, let the heads & Galleries for the Ships be neatly Carv'd & Executed, I leave the Device to you, but by all means let ours be as good, handsome, strong, & as early Compleated as any that are building here or in any of the other Colonies, for your reputation & mine is at stake, & there are not wanting those who are fond of prejudicing both.”<sup>12</sup>

## Frustration Mounts

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WHEN THE Marine Committee of Congress appointed John Manley to the command of one of the Massachusetts frigates, it appointed Isaac Cazneau to the other.<sup>1</sup> For sheer anonymity during the period, Cazneau is without peer—one might equally well try to observe a shadow by its edge—but when Hector McNeill hove into view two months later, the effect on the Congress must have been little short of a thunderclap.

That would not be until June. In mid-April 1776, McNeill was still firmly planted at Point aux Tremble, sending a murder suspect under guard to Benedict Arnold, appraising vessels for Brigadier General Wooster, and moving provisions up and down the St. Lawrence River in consequence of other services he was performing for the Continental Army. Compared to Manley's heroic exploits with Washington's fleet, McNeill's performance appears anemic indeed, yet, for reasons that can only be guessed at, his influence was steadily on the rise.<sup>2</sup>

In early May, when armed British ships reappeared in the river above Quebec and prompted the American withdrawal from Canada, McNeill finally pulled foot and headed for Philadelphia more than 600 miles away. It has not been determined whether he was sent under orders

as a courier or simply went off his own bat, but persons traveling direct from the Northern Army to Congress were at such a premium that he certainly was entrusted with dispatches and private letters from such men as Arnold, Wooster, Lockwood, and other officers with whom he would meet along the way. Many, no doubt, begged leave to introduce him, the "bearer," to the most favorable notice of the Honorable members of Congress.

McNeill left Point aux Tremble for Montreal on the sixth of May, eleven days later passed through St. Johns on the Richelieu River, proceeded quickly to the south down Lake Champlain and Lake George, and by the twenty-fourth had reported to Major General Philip Schuyler at Fort George. He then set off for Albany and on to Philadelphia, where he must have arrived sometime in early June. About the fifth, the Congress, for the first time in a fortnight, received a fresh batch of communications from Canada and was able to debate their contents during the morning session of the sixth. Perhaps McNeill had delivered it; perhaps he had not. It matters little, really, when exactly he reached the seat of government except as it demonstrates how quickly the course of events was about to change.<sup>3</sup>

On 12 June, less than a week after receipt of the Canadian dispatches, John Hancock sent to Thomas Cushing a list of all the commanding officers appointed to the various frigates, together with the official list of the frigates' names announced on the sixth. Against *Hancock* was Manley's name; against *Boston*, that of Isaac Cazneau, as before. Three days later, however, the full Congress, acting



upon the recommendation of the Marine Committee, approved the appointment of "Mr. Hector M'Neal to command the frigate *Boston*." What happened? How did the whisper of a breeze build to a full gale within the space of little more than a week? Patronage, obviously, and exceedingly strong patronage at that, would have been necessary to galvanize the Congress into such unnatural decisiveness. But how? Was Cazneau's initial appointment nothing more than a temporary expedient? Did McNeill talk his way in? Buy his way in? Garner favor purely from nepotism? And what of the title *Mr.* rather than *Captain*? That, in itself, is extraordinary and hardly implies anything by way of maritime or naval expertise to his credit. Finally, how could the President of the Continental Congress, John Hancock himself, be ignorant of the rising wind of sentiment only three days before the cloudburst? The answers have been washed away virtually without trace. For whatever the reasons, Hector McNeill now commanded the Continental frigate *Boston* by a resolve of Congress.



In Newburyport, the shipyards had been uncommonly active. Thomas Cushing, particularly aware of the onus upon him to "Exert every Nerve to promote Dispatch," had advised Hancock that not only would they "have two as fine Ships as any upon the Continent" but also they would "be ready as soon if not sooner than many of the rest. Mess<sup>s</sup> Greenleaf & Cross's hearts are engaged in the Cause," he added, "they are very active & Industrious." Please send some more money.<sup>4</sup>



John Bradford, the newly appointed Continental agent at Boston, reenforced the general spirit of optimism even as Manley learned of his appointment to *Hancock* and McNeill was still somewhere in the vicinity of Montreal. Usually crabby and highly critical of much that passed before his notice, Bradford nonetheless wrote encouragingly to John Hancock on 15 May, telling him that "our Builders go on briskly the small Frigate [*Boston*] we shall launch the next full moon. we this day began to lay her upper deck and I cant but flatter my self the Ships will be equal in every Respect to any on the Continent."<sup>5</sup>

The next full moon, accompanied by its spring tide, would occur on the second of June, a Sunday, which caused the event to be postponed to the next day's pre-noon high water. "On Monday, the 3d instant," reported the *Boston Gazette*, "one of the Continental frigates of 24 Guns, built at Newbury Port, under the direction of the Hon. Thomas Cushing, Esq; was launched in the view of a great number of Spectators, she is highly approved by all who are judges as a very fine Ship, she is built with the very best of Timber, and the workmanship is compleat."<sup>6</sup>

*Hancock* was launched a few weeks later in early July, although not without incident, for she stuck on the ways but was got off later without injury and towed alongside the Newburyport Long Wharf to be masted and sparred. Withal, John Hancock's fears that the two Massachusetts vessels would be among the last launched proved to be unfounded. *Boston* was the fourth to take her plunge, preceded only by the two Rhode Island frigates and New Hampshire's *Raleigh*. *Hancock* and two of the Pennsyl-

vania ships followed in a welter of greasy smoke in a dead heat.



The three British frigates, destined to figure so prominently in the careers of Manley and McNeill the following year, in the interim had sailed from Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> First away had been H.M. frigate *Fox*, Captain Patrick Fotheringham, on the eleventh of March from Spithead for the coast of Newfoundland, there to cruise between Cape Race and St. John's for the protection of the British fishery and "to take or destroy any of the Ships or Vessels belonging to the associated Colonies of No America which may be found in those parts."

*Rainbow*, Captain Sir George Collier, sailed on 6 May from the Isle of Wight as part of Captain William Hotham's convoy of frigates, fireships, victuallers, and transports carrying a large force of Hessian mercenaries to the battlefields of America. She would reach British-held New York harbor at the beginning of August.

The frigate *Flora*, Captain John Brisbane, preceded *Rainbow* to sea by one week. Because it was her captain who commissioned the four oil paintings that are the genesis for this volume and because *Flora* was to cause a flurry of excitement in Massachusetts waters upon her arrival there, her passage to America deserves more than cursory notice.

*Flora* left Chatham in the lower Thames on 10 March 1776 for Spithead, whence Admiralty orders sent her to the Clyde to take under convoy a fleet of transports containing Scottish troops and then to make the best of

her way to Boston to join forces with Major General William Howe and Vice Admiral Molyneux Schudham. *Flora* came to an anchor in Greenock Roads on the fourteenth of April, where twelve hundred men of the Forty-second regiment (Royal Highlanders) and 2,300 others of Frazer's Seventy-first Highlanders were embarked in their vessels by the end of April.

With thirty-three transports in company, *Flora* sailed from the Clyde on 29 April. Within days, hail, sleet, and gales scattered the convoy beyond recall. Most of the ships found themselves either wholly on their own or in contact with but few of their companions throughout a long crossing. Not one was aware that the British had evacuated Boston in mid-March, because the news reached the British Isles three days after their departure. A few chanced to speak other vessels when on soundings off the coast of Nova Scotia and so learned of the situation in season to turn aside for Halifax. Most of the others, including *Flora*, remained uninformed.

On the sixth of June, three of Washington's schooners cruising in Massachusetts Bay sighted a lone ship in the offing, standing for Boston. She proved the ship *Anne*, the vanguard of Brisbane's convoy, and was taken without as much as the firing of a shot. Ten days later, three more of the Scottish transports ran amok of the schooners at dawn just outside Boston harbor. All three struck after dark the same day to a force consisting of Washington's five North Shore schooners and the Connecticut colony brig *Defence*.

Finally, on 23 June, *Flora* herself, in company with the

nine transports that had managed to stick with her, appeared in the bay. "The old hen *Flora*," wrote a diarist in Marblehead the next day, "layeth about five leagues off and keepeth all her chickens around her as there is ten sail of hawks a-flying about them and no hen's nest at Nantasket [Roads in Boston Harbor]. This evening the *Flora* fired for a cock to assist her in to a nest, but the cocks are all gone to roost abroad."<sup>8</sup>

Boston was now firmly in American hands, the last of the rearguard British warships having withdrawn. With Washington's five schooners, the Massachusetts state navy sloop *Tyrannicide*, and four privateers constantly circling about the convoy, *Flora* and her fauna milled about the bay for a week, firing guns and bending on private recognition signals to summon nonexistent British pilot boats from Boston. At last, fully convinced that the English jack and pendant flying from the site of the Boston lighthouse were no more than decoys, Brisbane squared away for sea. On 3 August, after an exhausting passage of nearly fourteen weeks from the Clyde, *Flora* and the remains of her convoy dropped anchor in New York harbor.



The Continental frigate *Boston*, launched on 3 June 1776, was in most respects fit for the sea by mid-July except in two essential particulars—personnel and cannon. *Hancock* fared about the same, but at least had the benefit of John Manley's presence to supervise the fitting-out process, whereas in early July Hector McNeill was still in Philadelphia testifying before the committee of Con-

gress investigating the conduct of the Canadian campaign and did not arrive in Massachusetts until the twenty-second of the month.

The questions of men and guns may at first seem unrelated, but in fact they were inseparable owing to the inability of the Congress or of the Marine Committee to act upon either. Thomas Cushing had first broached the subject of men as early as the latter part of April; that of cannon had arisen a month and a half earlier still. It seems probable that the heat generated by the frustrations of the following months was to have much to do with fanning the embers of Manley's and McNeill's antagonisms into an open flame by the beginning of the new year.

A stroke or two of the pen could have resolved many of the difficulties concerning men and recruitment, but the procurement of cannon was another matter entirely. They simply did not exist; at least, not in sufficient quantities to satisfy the demands from the army, coastal forts, state navy vessels, a blossoming of privateers, and now the frigates. Cushing had always assumed his cannon would either be sent from Philadelphia or, if that proved impossible, he would be authorized to purchase them locally wherever found. His letters to John Hancock and to Robert Treat Paine touched on the subject time after time, growing more and more impatient as the weeks and months rolled by.

"I wrote you some time Ago," he reminded Paine on 30 July, "to send me the dimensions of the Cannon you were preparing for the Ships, but have never had a line from you upon that subject; pray send me a draft of the



Cannon designed for each Ship, that I may have the Carriages Completed forthwith, let me have their dimensions very particularly & minutely—& let me know what weight of Metal you allow for the 24 Gun Frigate & what weight of Metal for the 32 Gun Ship—pray when will the Cannon be here? the Ships are waiting entirely for them & the Orders for Enlisting the Men—do you design the Ships shall be of any service this Summer or in the Fall, if you do, you must be more Expeditious about the Cannon, pray let me entreat you, to hurry this matter. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

Whatever had happened to the Congressional pipe dream that the frigates could be laid down and be ready for sea within three months? The delays, James Warren wrote to John Adams, “disgusts the officers, and occasions them to repent entering the service.”

By the end of August, John Manley had become thoroughly enraged by everything. Lacking a reliable contemporaneous estimate of his feelings at the time, we must reconstruct them as best we can from the clues available. Over four months had passed since his appointment to the Continental Navy and nearly that much since his resignation from Washington’s fleet. What had he to show for it? Nothing save weeks of inactivity when he should have been at sea taking prizes, an appointment but as yet no official commission, only a handful of officers and they without commissions or warrants either, no cannon nor the prospect of getting any, no recruiting orders, no men above shipkeepers, no sea orders, no recognition. Was this what was due to a commodore who earlier in the year had been showered with honors and had even had a tavern



in Salem named for him? And what of this blustery person McNeill who had never taken a prize in his life and apparently owed his appointment solely to pull in high places? To Manley, the whole administrative honeycomb must have seemed corrupt, indecisive, and incapable of reaching any proper decision, a state of affairs brought home with sickening clarity when, on 22 August, the New Hampshire admiralty court acquitted the brig *Elizabeth* which he, Daniel Waters, and John Ayres had captured and sent in to Portsmouth for condemnation the previous April.

Fulminating over incompetence wherever he turned, Manley set off for Philadelphia on the thirty-first of August, determined to have the court decision reversed by Congress and to secure guns for his frigate or else tender his resignation.

## Thinly Disguised Misgivings

BY TRAVELING TO Philadelphia when he did, Manley accepted a slippery perch between two stools—risking on the one side by his absence from Newburyport a loss of control over speedy outfitting of his frigate and, on the other, an inability to solicit Congressional favor in person. It was a calculated risk, but McNeill's activities warranted, from his point of view at least, taking the chance. A memorial from Thomas Cushing to the Massachusetts Council requesting the loan of "a Number of Cannon, in and About Boston" had been read out on 15 August and approved of in principal the same day—cannon for McNeill's ship, not for Manley's. Seedlings of jealousy, if watered, tend to sprout luxuriant foliage, but, obviously, a twenty-four-gun frigate could be armed more readily than a thirty-two.

The expedient of borrowing ordnance from the state derived from the threatening activity of H.M. frigate *Milford* which had been taking numerous prizes off the coast. "The Continental Frigates," wailed Cushing to Robert Treat Paine, "if they were now out, might be of eminent service, O for Cannon! The spirit of Privateering prevails so amazingly here that Cannon cannot be procured, if at all, but at a most extravagant price—pray forward them

from Philadelphia if possible & send me the dimensions of the Guns by the first opportunity that I may compleat the Carriages, for the General Court apprehending the 24 Gun Frigate will not be a Match for the *Milford* of 28 Guns are About placing the Guns, they proposed lending to me, on board the Portsmouth Frigate [*Raleigh*], if Capt. Langdon will consent she should go out And Attack the *Milford*. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

On 21 September 1776, the Continental Congress ordered *Boston* and *Raleigh* to prepare for sailing orders. Thus, notwithstanding the shifting status of the cannon—available, unavailable, en route, not yet sent forward—it became a pressing concern to recruit a complement of men. Without cannon already on board, however, no incentive existed for men to enlist when much more immediate and attractive privateering ventures lurked at every hand, the whole complicated by the fact that none of the appointed officers had yet received commissions or warrants. “They will not Care to go to Sea,” Cushing warned the Marine Committee, “till they are possessed of them least they should be deem’d Pirates.”

Whatever misgivings John Manley may have harbored about being so far removed from Newburyport vanished once and for all on the tenth of October when the Congress settled the matter of the captains’ relative rank. John Manley found himself second in seniority among twenty-four.

Hector McNeill’s name came third on the list, a circumstance that rankled McNeill more and more as time went on. Belying the indifference he claimed to feel, his

later protestations to the Marine Committee certainly illustrate a thinly disguised indignation that his place and Manley's had not been reversed. "I take the Liberty to assure you," he would write in his typically fulsome style, "That when I entered into the Continental Service I had not one Single thought whither I should be placed the third or the Thirteenth upon the List, my ambition was fully satisfied when I was favoured with a Commission placing me where I now am, and Altho I did then foresee that one day or other I might possibly fall under the Command of one man, whose Ability I had reason to doubt, yet I was determined that happen whensoever it might I would Obey and follow his instructions with all that Zeal which becomes a faithful Servant to the Publick, who will never neglect or loose Sight of his duty for any private view whatever."<sup>2</sup> This was McNeill to a tee: self-righteous, conceited, frequently outspoken, and always verbose.

By the time a more introspective but equally vainglorious John Manley headed north from Philadelphia in late October, the Marine Committee had drafted definitive orders to him and also to McNeill and Captain Thomas Thompson of the frigate *Raleigh*. "We expect the Continental frigates *Hancock*, *Boston* and *Raleigh* under your respective commands, are either now ready for the Sea, or shortly will be so. You are hereby directed to act in concert and Cruize together, for the following purposes, and on the following Stations. Your first object must be to inform yourselves in the best manner possible, if any of the British men of war are Cruizing in the bay of Boston or

off the Coast of Massachusetts, and all such you are to endeavour with your utmost force to take, sink, or destroy. Having effected this service you are to proceed together towards Rhode Island, and there make prize of or destroy any of the enemies Ships of war that may be found Cruizing off the Harbour or Coast of Rhode Island.'"<sup>3</sup>

Contingency orders followed, but neither their intent nor their stated purposes would be carried out for the simple reason that they could not be. As before, the unavailability of sufficient ordnance and manpower precluded any possibility of cruising for months to come.

As the autumn season advanced, McNeill became apprehensive that unless *Boston* were removed soon from the narrow confines of Newburyport harbor she ran the risk of being locked in by ice for the better part of the winter. Thus, on 30 October, while Manley was still on the road between Philadelphia and New England, *Boston*, now mounting twenty-eight cannon borrowed from the state, manned by 100 volunteers and thirty English prisoners of war impressed for the service, a local independent company of militia acting as Marines, and a handful of French officers assisting McNeill on the quarterdeck, crossed the Newburyport bar and sailed around Cape Ann for Boston harbor without incident.

Manley no sooner returned and found *Boston* lying against the Boston wharves than he petitioned the Massachusetts General Court to permit her guns to be unshipped and sent back to Newburyport by water to enable *Hancock* to join her. The petition was granted on 13 November. Two weeks later, *Hancock* arrived in Nantasket



Roads. "Capt. Manly has therefore exerted himself to get her Round, and has been obliged to be at very considerable expense to execute this business at this season of the year."



At the beginning of the new year, 1777, the budding animosities between Manley and McNeill began to surface in public. Less by way of recapitulation than by furthering the probable explanations for their impasse, it becomes prudent to examine the two men in some detail. The known causes are unfortunately scantily documented—no statements specifying the precise sources of their disaffection have been found—but it is not difficult to interpret the surviving evidence.

In background and personality, they could not have been at more opposite poles. McNeill, despite his abhorrence of the Irish part of his blood, had nonetheless inherited the gift of gab, the volubility, and the mercurial temperament more frequently associated with a son of Erin than with a Scottish West Highlander. Bluff, impatient, and forthright, he gave offense easily by impassioned outcries when more diplomatic overtures would have had a better effect. "I wrote you a Letter on bussness yesterday," he once snapped at John Bradford, the Continental Agent in Boston, "why you have not answer'd it I cannot say—your Answer I Expect by 8 o Clock tomorrow morning,"<sup>4</sup> a missive annotated by Bradford as "Hector M<sup>c</sup>Neeles impudent Billet." Indeed, McNeill seems to have been incapable of containing his thoughts in silence. His emotions demanded expression either by blasts of



contentious conversation or by long, frothy letters in which he almost always made himself sound self-righteous if not martyred. One is constantly reminded of the opinions he held of his companions, when captured by the Indians in 1755, who by "theire stupid neglect betrayd me into the present delima." Nearly identical accusations would surface as a consequence of his disastrous cruise with John Manley.

Manley's South Devon heritage no doubt contributed in large measure to his less expansive personality, for the region of his birth tended to produce taciturn men of independent thought who formed their judgments without an accompanying compulsion to vocalize them except upon the most trying of occasions. Manley had been made in such a mold. His ambition, pride, and vanity certainly equaled McNeill's in almost every respect, even if clothed in a different fabric, but there the similarities ended. McNeill's loquacity must have galled Manley to the extremes of his patience, whereas Manley's introspective nature would have infuriated McNeill because he would have been incapable of coping with it. The Commodore's reticence, furthermore, applied as much to the written word as to his speech. Relatively few of his letters survive, probably because he was not forever trying to express himself on paper as McNeill was, yet from those that do one can sense something more about him—pride, yes, but a pride of accomplishment and self-assurance; firmness; professional competency; and even an occasional flash of the most subtle humor—all of which suggests that despite the swaggers and jealousies of the moment he took him-

self a lot less seriously than might be expected. Somehow, he simply does not come across as the same man later described by McNeill as “totally unequal to the Command with which he has been intrusted, he being ignorant, Obstinate, Overbearing and Tyranical beyound discription, a man under whose command none can live with pleasure but such creatures as himself, and those also must be of his own makeing.”<sup>5</sup>

If this were, in fact, so, it is very difficult to explain why Manley never experienced the altercations with his men and officers that beset McNeill in days to come. Manley, James Warren wrote to Samuel Adams a year after the naval fiasco had taken place, “is a Blunt, Honest, and I believe Brave Officer. he was first in the Service, and merited much by his Conduct . . . he is extreemly popular with Officers, and Seamen, and can Man a Ship with dispatch. . . .”<sup>6</sup> Continuing, in a subsequent letter to Adams: “I do think no Caution ought to be used in speaking of his Bravery. with a Command of a Single Ship my opinion is he would equal perhaps any in that respect, tho his Judgment and Abilities might not be equal to others in the direction of more Ships than one. however, between us, I would much rather trust him even there than another I could name, whose pretences to both are more Confident, and besides who believed better in the beginning in a Little Schooner Exposed to all the Men of War. . . .”

In contrast, Warren’s concurrent assessment of McNeill tends to uphold what the other evidence suggests: “his Address is Insinuating, and his Assurance great. he may tell you fine Storys, but be Assured he has had as fair

and Impartial a Trial as a Man ever had, and as much Tenderness and delicacy both in the prosecution and Sentence as he ought to wish for.”<sup>8</sup>

When two such abrasive personalities come into contact, sparks are sure to fly, but sparks do not necessarily ignite a blaze unless there is tinder nearby to catch the fire. Had the imbroglio remained a personal matter between the two captains themselves, the sparks might never have caused anything more than a smoldering glow; however, when others began to take sides the tinder was introduced.

John Paul Jones, eighteenth captain of the twenty-four on the seniority list, was among those in Boston busily fanning the flames. In many respects, he and McNeill were much alike—arrogant, cocky, quick to criticize, and resentful of their places on the list—yet Jones, as history would demonstrate, possessed an understanding flair for his profession that was lacking in many of his colleagues. In Hector McNeill he saw a man who “besides his general knowledge of shipp, he inherits more *Marine Knowledge* than any other Man, with whom I have had equal conversation, in the Service.”<sup>9</sup> Because the one possessed attributes the other could admire, Jones and McNeill became loyal friends who took pleasure in verbally raking John Manley over the coals.

“There is a Fellow,” sniped Jones to a correspondent in January 1777, “who calls himself a Commodore and who keeps us at an Awful distance by Wearing [hoisting aboard *Hancock*] an English Broad Pendant . . . among many evident proofs of his Abilities as port Captain that

might be enumerated—this notable one may perhaps be Sufficient—for it seems that in his Absence he directs the First Lieut to take Orders from the Boatswain—Nay 'tis that on certain occasions he takes the Speaking Trumpet out of the Lieutenants hand on the Quarter Deck and delivers it on the Fore Castle to the Boatswain.—To be very serious, that such Despicable Characters should have Obtained Commissions as Commanders in a Navy is truly Astonishing and [might] Pass for Romance with me unless I had been convinced by my Senses of the Sad Reality.—I could easily enumerate many other characters as truly Original as Commission Officers but it gives me extreme pain to be Under the necessity of Attacking private Characters.—it is however some Consolation—indeed a great one that this depravity is not Universal—Among other deserving Characters that belong to the Fleet—I am happy from personal acquaintance to mention Captain McNeill as a Gentleman who will do Honor to the Service . . . I need not therefore name this great Man this *Commodore*! tho' I will if call'd upon and in the Meantime I aver that he is Altogether Unfit to Command a Frigate of thirty two Guns."<sup>10</sup>

This was the same letter in which Jones identified Manley as a former Boatswain's Mate in the Royal Navy and accused him, "if Fame Says true" of "not Deigning to Read English." Withal, it was a slanderous, unnecessarily vitriolic slur unworthy of either the writer or his subject and did nothing to promote harmony in the service for which Jones professed such high hopes. As for Manley's continuing use of the title "Commodore," there was noth-

ing either surprising or improper about it. It had simply stuck to him by courtesy since his days in Washington's Navy, but even so he was the ranking Continental Navy officer in Boston and as such was nominally responsible not only for his own *Hancock* but for *Boston* and any other Continental vessels that might be in port. By usage, he had every right to the title.



By mid January 1777, Hector McNeill was experiencing so much trouble keeping his seamen from deserting to privateers he ordered *Boston* to be warped from the wharf and hauled into the stream. She would lie there to moorings until the latter part of May. In the meantime, he had become so upset by the privateersmen's "iniquitous Schemes" that he was moved to fire a volley of long-winded protests to the Massachusetts Council, Manley, and others. At this point, the Commodore, despite everything, was still vainly attempting to maintain an equilibrium. "M<sup>rs</sup> Manley with myself," he assured McNeill, after thanking him for one of his communications, "Joins in Compliments & hope for a fair Wind soon."<sup>11</sup>

It was no use. Their differences were irreconcilable. "The General opinion which had prevail'd," McNeill stated at a future day, "that I was dissatisfied with being under Manley's Command, made me sett up a resolution to obey implicitly every one of his Commands . . . to the utmost of my power. I did however endeavour to advise him now and then when in a good mood, and he often appeared to attend to what I said; but the unstableness of



his Temper led him to do as he pleas'd. Nevertheless I follow'd him as the Jackall does the Lyon, without Grumbling except in my Gizard."<sup>12</sup>

On the twenty-third of March 1777, James Warren wrote to John Adams. "But no one thing gives me more uneasiness than the conduct of your Fleet. The *Hancock*, *Boston*, *Alfred* and *Cabot* are all yet in port. It is said the *Hancock* is ready to sail and was to have gone yesterday, but remains here yet. I fear the consequences of their going out single. But McNeil and Manly it is said like the Jews and Samaritans will have no connections or intercourse; they will not sail together. I believe McNeil is near ready for the sea. I am told that he and the Agent, Mr. Cushing, have had a breeze; but I am not acquainted with the particulars or how it terminated."<sup>13</sup>

"Manly and McNeal do not agree," echoed another of Adams' correspondents. "It is not, I believe, the Fault of the first . . . If they are not better united, infinite Damage may accrue."<sup>14</sup>

"The Fracas between [Manley] and McNeal," responded Adams from Philadelphia on 6 April, "had reached this Place before your Letter. . . ."<sup>15</sup> *Hancock*, leaving *Boston* still moored in midstream, by this time was sailing under a skeleton crew along the coast of Massachusetts Bay in search of recruits. She is known to have been in Marblehead harbor on that errand between the fifth and ninth of April; where else is a matter for conjecture, but she may well have spent some time on her mission.

Within a little more than a month both frigates would finally put to sea.





## Foxfire

“GENTLEMEN,” Hector McNeill wrote to the Marine Committee on 21 May 1777, “the long wish’d for hour is at last come in which I bid farewell, to the sleepy Agents, disheartned Tradesmen and distress’d Seamen who frequent the Streets of Boston. Happy should I account myself on my return from a Successfull Cruise, were I assured to find matters better conducted in this quarter than they have hitherto been but alas, Complaints Vanish into Air and there is nobody at home knock where we will.”<sup>1</sup>

On this day, according to his notation, *Boston* was “at Sea”—a hairsplitter of veracity if ever there were one. “Capt Manly having first ask’d me if I thought it Practicable” to sail, and McNeill having assented thereto, the Commodore that noon fired a signal for sailing.<sup>2</sup> By mid-afternoon, the Continental frigates *Hancock* and *Boston*, together with a small fleet of Boston privateers were working their way out of Nantasket Roads into Massachusetts Bay.

The idea of combining the frigates with the privateers had been ripening for over a month. Most of the original obstructions concerning cannon, recruits, commissions and warrants for the officers, by this time had been re-

solved. Instead, the great stumbling block during the past spring had been the absence of money with which to pay the men. Both Manley and McNeill had endeavored to the extremes of their power to correct the situation, but neither had accomplished much in that direction until the latter part of April. McNeill and John Bradford in March had practically come to blows when the Agent either refused or was unable to supply McNeill with a sufficiency of cash. Wrote McNeill: "I will assure you That if I am not Speedily Supply'd, I Shall disband my men, & quit the Service, for I cannot think my self Obligated to Sacrifice my reputation, in complisance to a set of men who can only be call'd drones in the common wealth."<sup>3</sup>

Funds had been forthcoming, however, as of the twenty-sixth of April when the Massachusetts House of Representatives agreed to advance the sums of £1635 and £400 for *Boston* and *Hancock* respectively. It did so because a number of privateers were willing to cruise temporarily with the frigates in an attempt to end the ravages of English men-of-war "daily making Captures of Vessels belonging to the Subjects of the United States and of their Allies and Friends, even within sight of our very Towns."<sup>4</sup>

Manley and McNeill had been forced to accept personal responsibility for repayment of such loans—much more so than actually should have been the case. Manley appears to have kept his own counsel in that regard; McNeill, in contrast, spent part of the day, while *Boston* was working her way out of the harbor, in his cabin complaining to the Marine Committee. "I have formerly taken the

freedom to mention," he lamented, "the most extraordinary conduct of the Agents in withholding prize Money and Wages from the poor distress'd Seamen who have hitherto Served in the Continental Vessells—'tis true I have no reason of Complaint myself because I never have been in the way of taking prizes, but . . . some who have Served as Officers are reduced to such Misery and distress that they have neither Cloaths to put on nor Victuals to eat . . . they can neither recover Wages nor Prize Money for their past Services . . . for heavens sake Gentlemen be pleased to enquire into the cause of such Complaints. . . . For mine own part, I have Suffer'd so much in fitting out the Ship I now have the Honour to Command, that I do not think I would undertake such a Task again for any Sum whatever unless I was better Supported . . . The very Interest of Money which I have borrowed and advanced to Carry on the Service of this Ship, would have maintained my Family in Credits, and Mr. Cushing expects that I take all this trouble, and risque on myself without a Commission [that is, a percentage], nay I have been Obliged to quarrell for Money to pay Men and Officers their Wages up to the 31st of March last . . . They must be paid their Wages allways up to one Month . . . I have no croneys, or Acquaintance to whom I will either Sacrifice the Publick Service or rights of my Brother Seamen. I will not live, where they are oppress'd or defrauded. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Theoretically, the privateers were bound by the oaths of their captains and the bonds of their owners to continue in company with the frigates for twenty-five days from the date of sailing unless Manley, as commodore of

the fleet, chose to come into port and discharge them sooner. In actuality, it would not happen that way, for privateersmen preferred in general to be masters of their own destinies, and these were no exceptions.

The roster of the participating vessels altered remarkably little during the last few weeks of outfitting. When the squadron left Boston harbor, excluding a few merchantmen trailing along momentarily for protection, it consisted of:

<i>Rig</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Guns</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Captain</i>
Ship	<i>Hancock</i>	32	c. 260	John Manley
Ship	<i>Boston</i>	30	235	Hector McNeill
Ship	<i>General Mifflin</i>	20	200	William Day
Brig	<i>Hawk</i>	12	80	Jonathan Oakes
Brig	<i>Sturdy Beggar</i>	14	—	—————
Schooner	<i>Active</i>	10	65	Andrew Gardner
Schooner	<i>America</i>	10	100	Daniel McNeill
Schooner	<i>Speedwell</i>	10	60	Jonathan Greely
Sloop	<i>Satisfaction</i>	8	c. 100	John Wheelwright

Two other armed vessels were to join from Marblehead or Cape Ann within twenty-four hours:

Ship	<i>American Tartar</i>	24	200	John Grimes
Schooner	<i>Buckram</i>	6	45	William Moroney

“Keep as close to the *Hancock* or *Boston* as possibly you can by Night and by Day,” Manley instructed the captain of *General Mifflin*, “and not to part with us upon consideration What Ever. If we should Fall in with two British Frigates you are to engage One of Said Frigates with the Ship *Hancock*.”<sup>6</sup>

“At 2 o’clock” on 21 May, the eternally vigilant Ashley

Bowen of Marblehead recorded, "sailed John Manley Esq. and two ships and 9 other vessels more from Nantasket for sea. Wind SSW; hauled off EbS. And at 4 o'clock sailed from here [Marblehead] the ship [*American*] *Tartar* for Cape Ann." At 6 p.m., McNeill sent his second lieutenant aboard the flagship for signals. This subject we must return to again and again, because it was a major factor of the disaster yet to come. The lieutenant returned empty-handed.

The next morning, the fleet lay to seaward off Halfway Rock between Boston and Gloucester and there was joined by the schooner *Buckram* which had been sent express from Marblehead by the now Brigadier General John Glover to warn that the two frigates "had been seen last evening close in with cape Ann harb'." McNeill went aboard *Hancock*, "communicated Gen<sup>l</sup> Glovers intelligence to Capt Manley [and then] returned again on board. . . ." *American Tartar* brought similar news. "Employ'd my self and my Clerke," continued McNeill in his logbook-journal, "in Transcribeing Signals for the better Mannagement of our Little fleet, as I had undertaken this at Capt Manleys request I hope'd some satisfaction in Seeing good order reigne among us, but there never was any use further Made of them."\*

That night, *Sturdy Beggar*, *Satisfaction*, and one or two of the merchantmen sheered off and disappeared for good.

The squadron, fanned out into two divisions during the next several days to cover as much area as possible, sailed around Cape Ann in search of enemy warships.



Shortly, an unidentified sail was seen in the northeast, but after a long chase, involving both Continental vessels each with a contingent of privateers also in pursuit, the chase ran for shelter in Portsmouth harbor, New Hampshire, thus proving she was no enemy. The frigates tacked toward the open sea.

Only five of the twenty-five days had passed, yet already the squadron was reduced in numbers. On the twenty-sixth of May, the ship *General Mifflin* broke off and bore away for Casco Bay with smallpox on board. The onset of strong northeasterly gales and drizzling rain gave the remaining privateers their excuse to complete the attrition. By nightfall the next day only *Hancock* and *Boston* remained within sight of each other. "Housed all the guns and wallow'd in water all night," wrote McNeill. "The gundeck Leak'd so that the most of the people were wet below as well as the officers."

In the late afternoon of the thirtieth, the masthead lookout aboard *Boston* "Espied a Sail, we made the Signal to Manley & gave chase immediatly, at half after 7 PM fire'd a bow chase and brought her too, She prove'd to be [the] Brig *Littleton* W<sup>m</sup> Johnson from London bound for N:york." The prize reported she had sailed with seven transports carrying 3,500 troops under convoy of H.M.S. *Somerset*, 64, and H.M. sloop *Mercury*, 28.

At dawn, four large vessels were discovered to windward, standing to the west, one of which McNeill instantly concluded was *Somerset*, although in fact she may well have been another ship altogether.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, John Manley has left no detailed ac-



John Brisbane, R.N., captain of H.M. frigate *Flora* and the man who commissioned the four paintings.

*Courtesy of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery*



*Hancock*      *Fox*      *Boston*      *Flora*      *Burning sloop*      *Rainbow*

First painting in the series by Francis Holman, 1779, depicting the naval engagement of 7 July 1777.  
The positions of *Hancock* and *Fox* should have been reversed.

*Peabody Museum of Salem*



*Fox*

*Hancock*

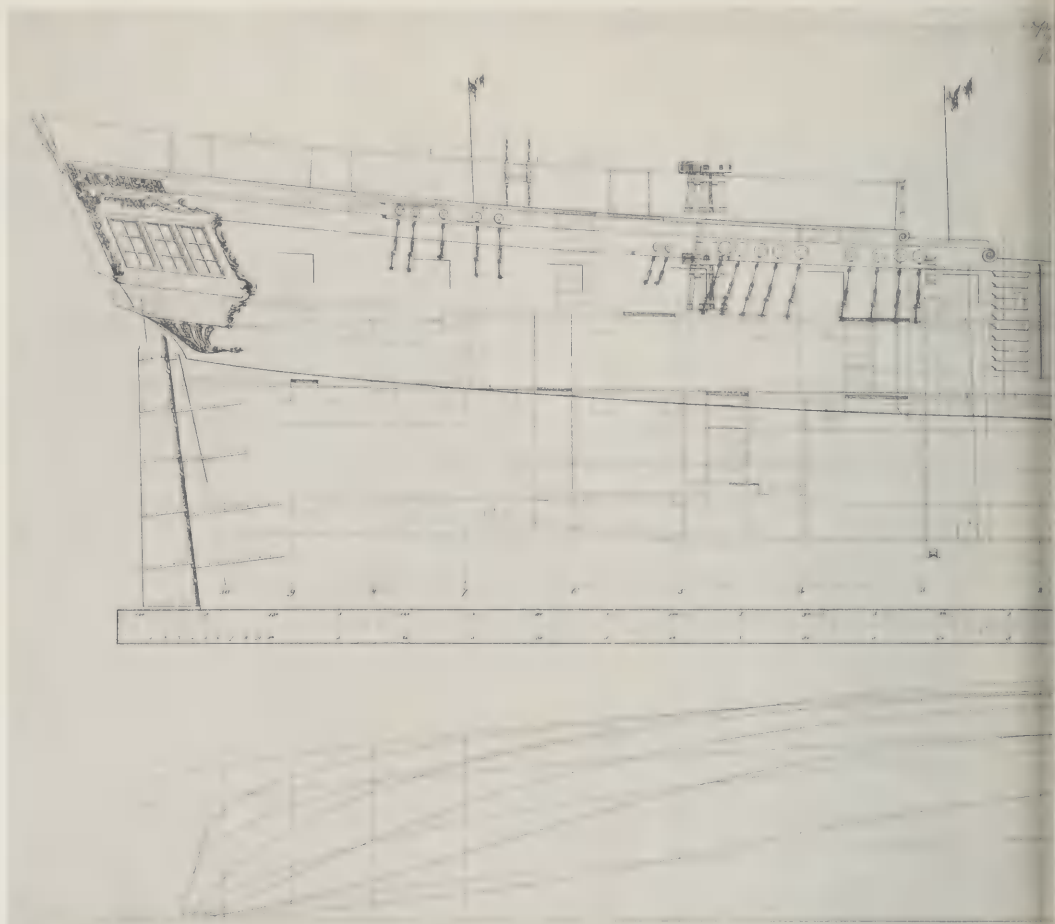
*Flora*

*Boston*

*Rainbow*

Second painting in the series by Francis Holman depicting the naval engagement of 7 July 1777.

*Peabody Museum of Salem*

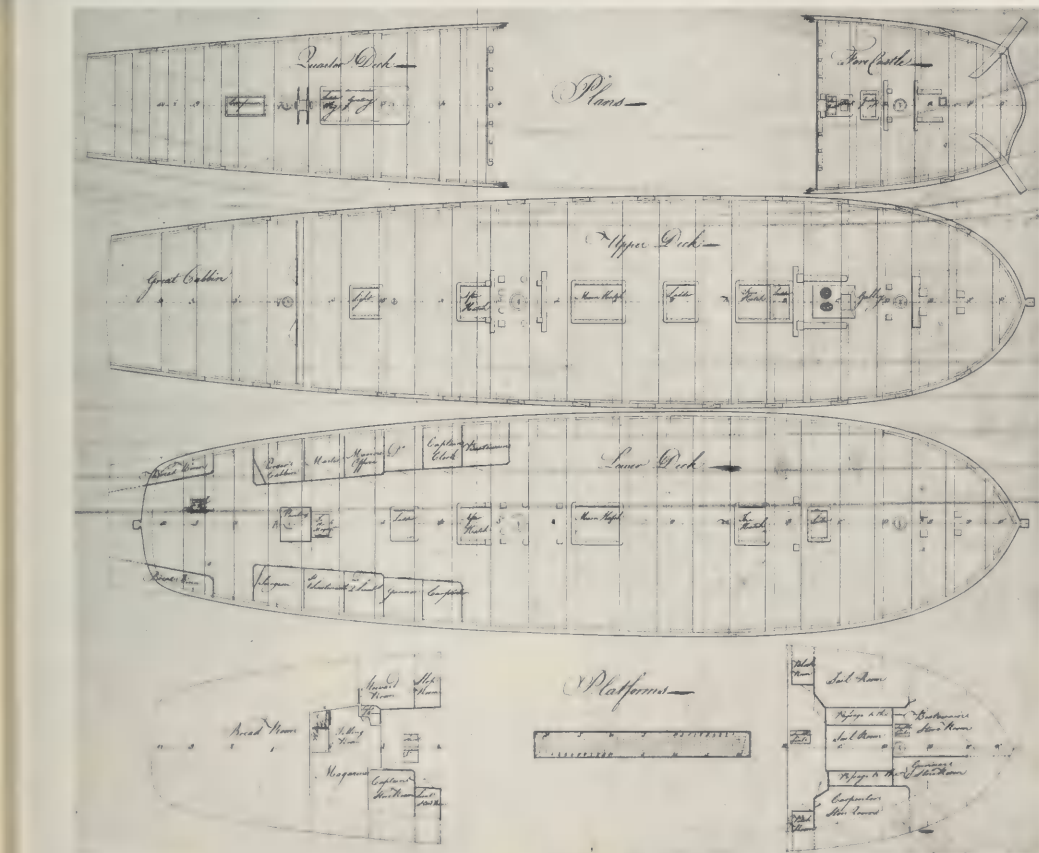


(Above) Lines plan of H.M. frigate *Iris* (formerly the Continental frigate *Hancock*) as taken off at the Plymouth, England, Dockyard in 1779 following her capture by H.M. frigate *Rainbow* on 8 July 1777.

(Right) Deck plans of *Iris*. Admiralty Collection of Draughts.

*Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England*

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*Hancock*

*Rainbow*

*Flora*

*Boston*

*Fox*

Third painting in the series by Francis Holman depicting the naval engagement on 7 July 1777.  
*Peabody Museum of Salem*



*Hancock Rainbow*

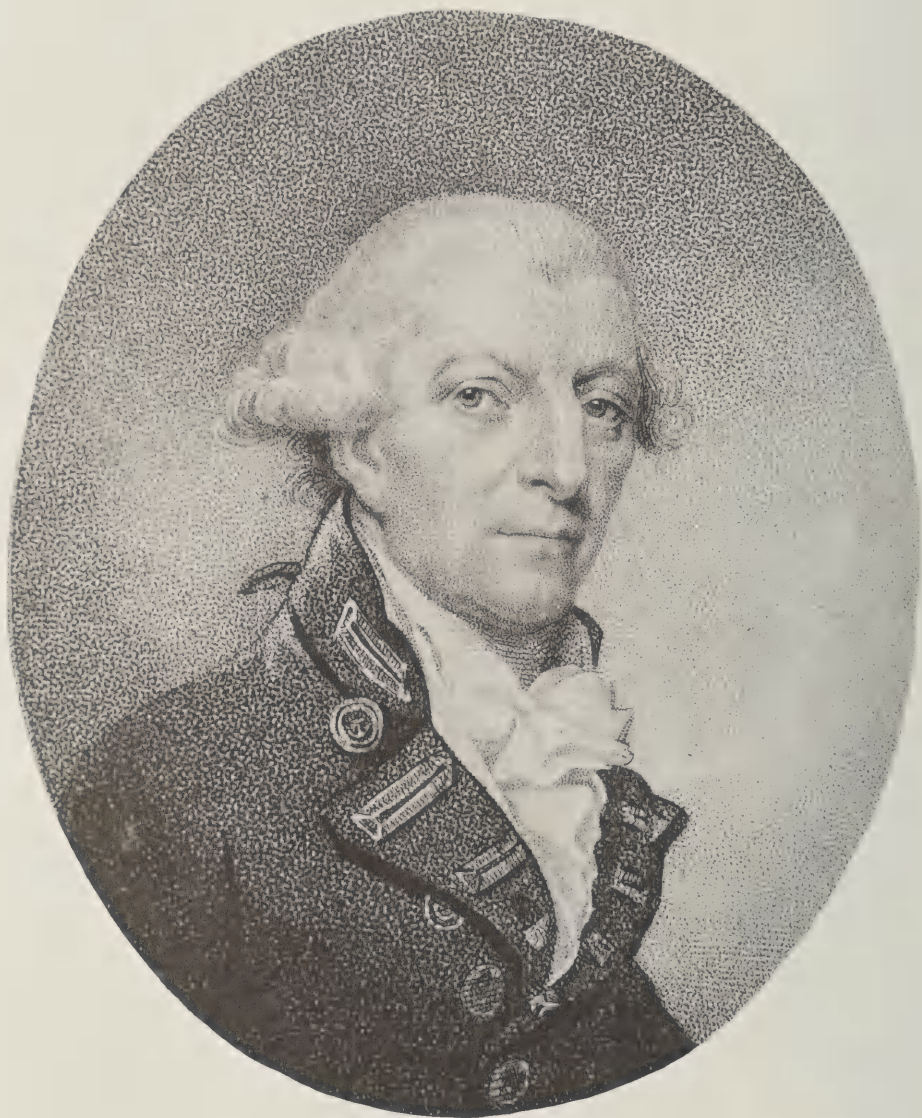
*Flora*

*Fox*

*Boston*

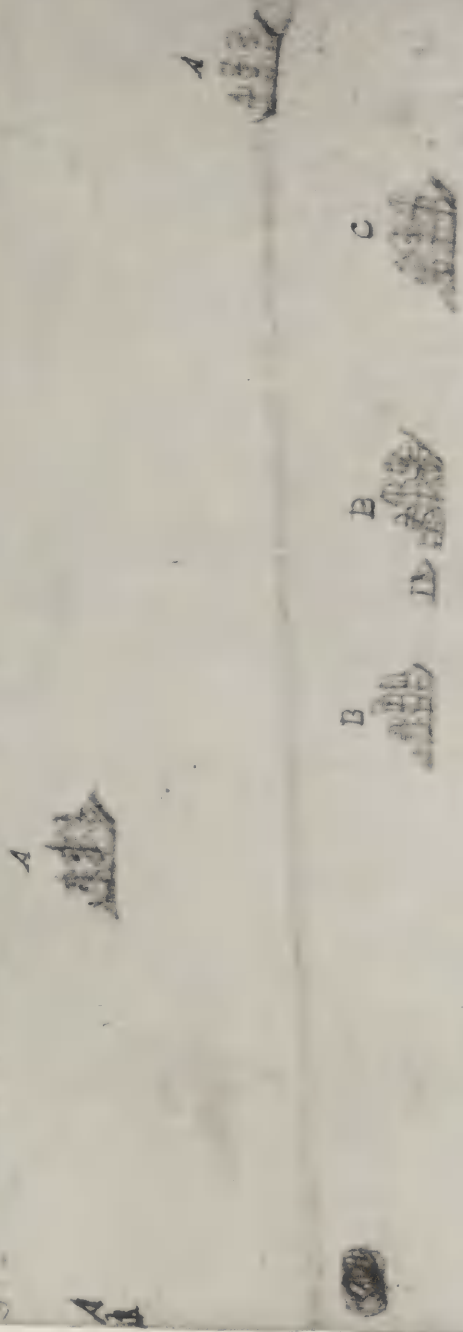
Fourth, and last, painting in the series by Francis Holman depicting the naval engagement on 7 July 1777.

*Penbody Museum of Salem*



Sir George Collier, R.N., captain of H.M. frigate *Rainbow*.  
Stipple engraving by Blood in *The Naval Chronicle* for 1814.

*Sketch of the American ships engaged by the British  
 on July 7th at a distance of 10 miles - A the British ships B the  
 American ships C the Fox range ship*



Victor

Rainbow

Boston

sloop

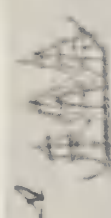
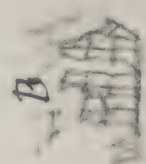
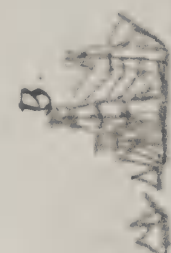
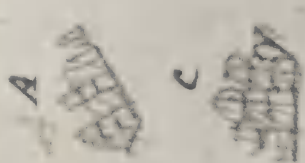
Hancock

Fox

Flora

This and the following plates are of ten sketches by Captain Hector McNeill of the Continental frigate *Boston* to illustrate the action of 7 July 1777. The times of day are McNeill's. They begin at 4:00 A.M.

*Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society*



at 5 o'clock A M

Flora  
Fox

Hancock

sloop

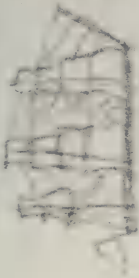
Boston

5:00 A.M.

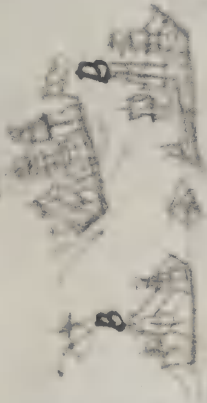
Rainbow

Victor

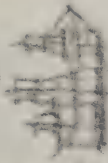
A



A



C



B



B



at 6 o'clock A.M.

Fox

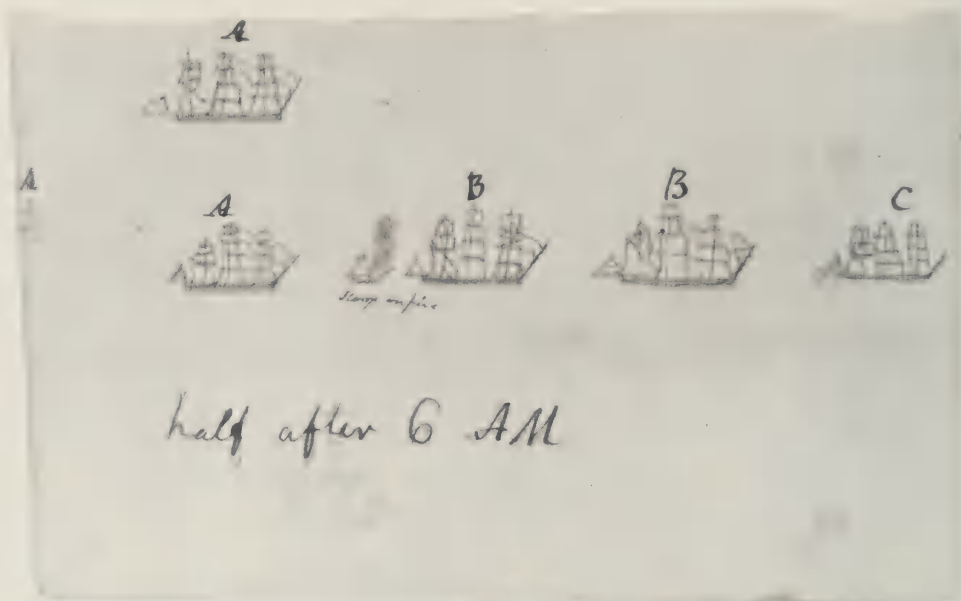
Boston sloop Flora Hancock

6:00 A.M.

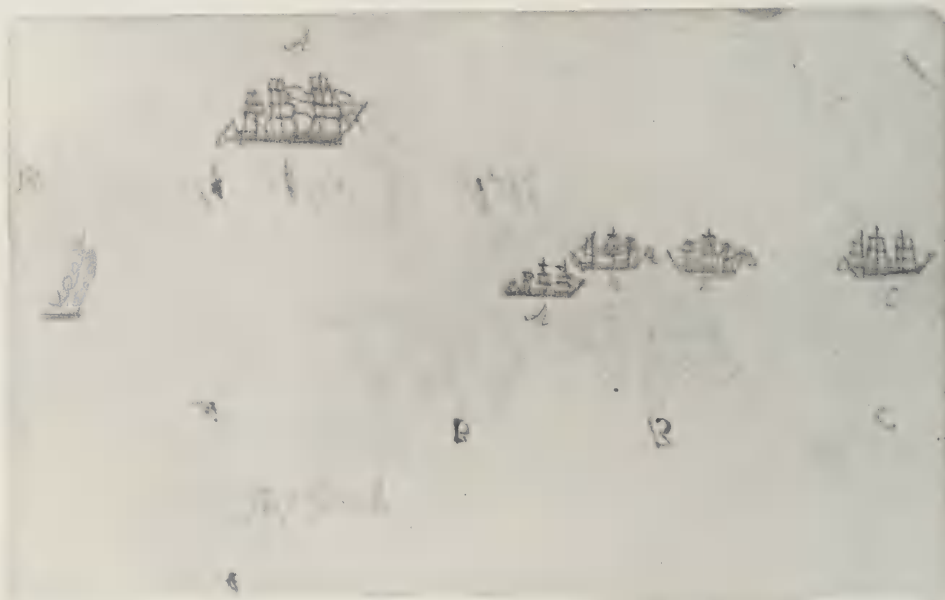
Rainbow

Victor

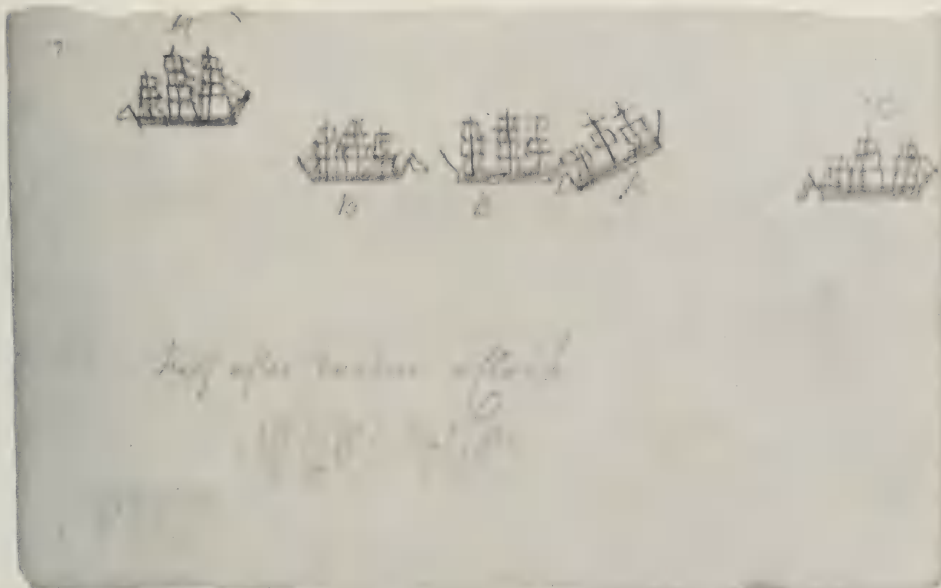




Victor      Rainbow  
               Flora      sloop      Boston      Hancock      Fox  
 6:30 A.M. The first of the Holman paintings depicts the action shortly  
 after the events indicated here.



sloop      Rainbow      Flora Boston Hancock      Fox  
 12 NOON.



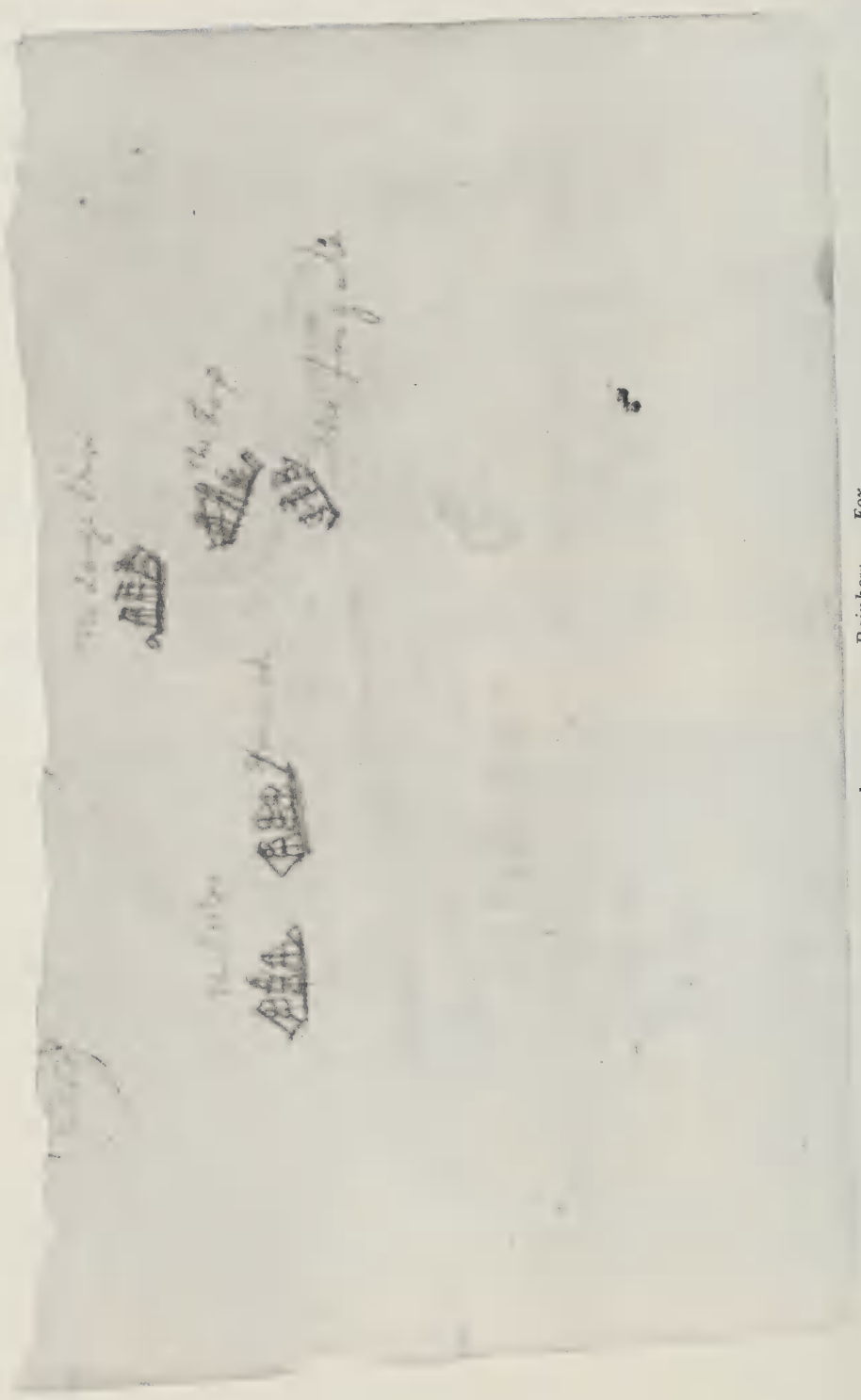
*Rainbow*      *Boston*      *Hancock*      *Flora*      *Fox*

12:30 P.M. The second Holman painting illustrates the fighting just before the positions shown here.



*Rainbow*      *Boston*      *Hancock*      *Flora*      *Fox*

[1:00 P.M.]



Fox  
Flora

Rainbow

Hancock

Boston

[1:30 P.M.]

10th



Boston  
Fox  
Hancock  
Rainbow  
Flora

[2:00 P.M.] This is actually the ninth sketch in sequence, not the "10th."



*Boston Fox Flora Hancock Rainbow*

[2:30 P.M.] The third Holman painting shows this phase of the action.

count of his cruise with McNeill; only scraps, and few enough of those as it is. For many details, therefore, we are at the mercy of McNeill's personal and partisan comments which must be read in the knowledge that most of them were written months after the events took place when self-justification was then for him a most imperative necessity.

McNeill "made the Signal to Speak with Manley that I might perswade him not to run directly into their Tract a head of them, they being to windward, in which position 'twould be very hard to discover their Force before they were very near us. No notice however was taken of my Signal."<sup>10</sup>

Yet to be convinced of their actual strength, Manley was not about to run before he was fully satisfied he was outmatched. McNeill clapped on sail, caught up, and hailed him, trying to convince him this was surely *Somerset* with part of her convoy and that a speedy withdrawal would be prudent. Manley responded by ordering him to take their prize brig out of harm's way.

As McNeill withdrew to one side, Manley continued to lie where he was—cleared for action, his courses up, his small sails handed—waiting. By the time the British ship came within grapeshot range and opened fire, he had seen enough to acknowledge he had no further business there. "Very Luckily for him," sniped McNeill, "the *Hancocks* Heels saved his Bacon . . . Shott flew over him for an hour, by which Time I Tack'd to the Northw'd upon the Three Ships a Stern of her, and when I came within long Shott of them, the *Somerset* left chasing Manley



and return'd to her Convoy; having Spoke with them, she wore and Chac'd me Six or Seven hours."

All the while, McNeill had his hand-pumping fire-control engine on deck wetting down the sails to close their pores and make them draw better. *Boston*, in his opinion, was "the most Ticklish Ship to keep in trim that ever I was acquainted with," and during the cruise he was to perform many experiments (see pp. 99-100) to find her best points of sailing. Now, with an enemy in hot pursuit, he shifted two bow guns aft and moved the men around to distribute their weight until at length *Boston* began to gain. A little before night, the British ship broke off and rejoined her convoy.

June 1777 was born with large seas, rain, and squally weather, but by the fourth it had moderated to the extent that Manley was enabled to visit *Boston* socially. "Capt Manley came & dined with me," grumbled McNeill. "Titles & honours I despise them both—but such a favour must not be forgotten he told me he long'd to kiss me friday last for my conduct respecting the *Somerset*—a great fav'"!

The two captains, by steering east and north, hoped to encounter strays from the same convoy, but almost a week passed while they crossed onto the Banks of Newfoundland without sighting anything more than "a few miserable Fishermen" through the fog. Manley sent one of his lieutenants aboard *Boston* with fog signals to be observed (McNeill took neither official nor personal notice of this), and the two groped their way along until the weather cleared at last toward the end of the first week in June.

On the seventh,<sup>11</sup> *Hancock* and *Boston* made a prize of the fishing brig *Patty*, Thomas Hardy, skipper, from Dartmouth in England. Said the Commodore to Hardy as he “welcomed” him aboard the flagship: “I have been out a fortnight and met with no success until I saw you. Your vessel is of no value to me, but I mean to destroy the fishery by sinking, burning, taking, or destroying all I may find, which business I am ordered by the Congress to do.”<sup>12</sup> The brig was stripped and set afire by Manley’s order—“burnt,” McNeill commented sourly, “for Country Sake.”

The next dawn, the frigates discovered a large ship to leeward. Although they did not know her identity at the time, nor indeed until after the action was over, she was H.M. frigate *Fox*, Captain Patrick Fotheringham. Since her initial arrival in North American waters fourteen months before, *Fox* had been attached to Vice Admiral John Montagu’s Newfoundland squadron, and for six of those months had patrolled the harbors along the south coast as well as the fishing banks offshore. In October 1776, she had returned briefly to England via Cadiz and Lisbon, but in early April 1777 sailed for Newfoundland again with a convoy. *Somerset* and her accompanying transports had left Britain at the same time. Having seen her charges safely to North America, *Fox* resumed her cruises on the banks as before.<sup>13</sup>

When sighted by the Continental frigates, *Fox* was to leeward of them, standing to the northeast; the weather was clear, a fresh west-southwest breeze was blowing, and the sea was large. Their position was approximately

sixty leagues (about 180 miles) southeast of Cape Race, Newfoundland. *Hancock* was well ahead of *Boston* on a westerly course.

It should surprise no one that neither opponent recognized the other definitely for what he was. Communications in that day between ships at sea counted for little except where recognition signals had been preestablished between cooperating vessels. The ruse and the deception were integral parts of tactical warfare. In this case, the American frigates had the advantage of assuming that the St. George's colors flying from the flagstaff of the stranger undoubtedly meant what they indicated, whereas Captain Fotheringham had no sure way of knowing immediately whether or not the red ensign flown by the lead vessel in chase of him was genuine.

Less than an hour after their initial contact, Manley had run down within hailing distance. *Fox* fired a gun to leeward—a universal interrogatory—"identify yourself!"

Manley hailed. "What ship is that? From whence came you?" Fotheringham gave no answer; only repeated the questions.<sup>14</sup>

"An American Rover," cried the Commodore. "Strike to the American Colonies or I will fire into you!"

"I will strike as soon as possible!" cracked Fotheringham, who then turned aside and shouted to his gun crews: "Men, are your guns clear?"

"Yes!"

"Then, if you are ready, fire away, but not in vain!"

As this exchange was in progress, *Hancock* struck her

false colors, hoisted the Grand Union flag of the Thirteen United Colonies, and fired a broadside. *Fox* returned it.

By this time, *Boston*, which had been well astern during the chase, was coming down too fast for Fotheringham's comfort. After firing two broadsides, he hauled his wind in an effort to escape. Manley and McNeill followed in hot pursuit. The chase now rejoined, it was several more hours before Manley was enabled to come up close upon *Fox's* larboard quarter. Just after noon, "a Spitefull Short Action Ensued." *Fox* put her helm to starboard, attempting to rake. *Hancock* answered by a poorly aimed broadside which did nothing more than to shoot away her maintopmast studding-sail halliards.

There survives a colored account of the concurrent activity aboard *Hancock*, afterwards communicated by a British witness to a correspondent in New York. "... During the running fight with the *Fox*, some of the *Hancock's* crew having showed strong signs of fear and dismay, Manley, sensible of this, ran continually from one end of the ship to the other, in his waistcoat, his shirt sleeves tucked up to his shoulders, flourishing and swinging a great cutlass around his head, and with the most horrid imprecations, swearing he would cut down the first man who should attempt to leave his quarters."<sup>15</sup>

*Fox* then fired her guns that bore and attempted to slip out of range, but *Hancock* clung to her. The two slugged it out at close range for the better part of an hour and a half.

It took all that time before *Boston* finally joined the fray. As she approached within pistol shot of *Fox's* starboard quarter, Captain Fotheringham asked his lieuten-

ants what in their opinion ought to be done. *Fox* had five shot through the mizzenmast, both the maintopmast and the mainmast head were damaged, the main spring stay had parted, two strands of the mainstay had been severed, the fore and main braces were gone as also were the larboard main topsail braces, the main yard had been shot away in its slings, and the mizzen yard had vanished over the side. Several men, including his Lieutenant of Marines, were dead and a number of the others had been wounded. With the arrival of the second rebel frigate, the lieutenants agreed with Fotheringham that further resistance would be in vain. The gunner and boatswain seconded their views. Fotheringham thus gave orders to strike his colors.

The arrival of McNeill within range certainly tipped the scales, for had *Boston* not been there at all it is entirely within the realm of possibility that Manley might have been forced to strike to Fotheringham. *Hancock's* situation really was little better than *Fox's*. Manley had four killed and six wounded. When the engagement began, McNeill pointed out, they had "all their small kites out, they were both in the most helpless condition at the end of the Action. The *Fox* had pegg'd Mr. Manley's ribbs so well that he had his pumps going, and both Ships were by the Lee—with every Sail abroad."<sup>18</sup>

*Boston* gave *Fox* "a Noble Broid Side witch made them to Strike a meadeatly a Bout half after one," one of the American seamen recorded in his journal. McNeill concurred: she had surrendered in consequence of his broadside. Here the evidence is several shades of grey. Thomas

Hardy, skipper of the captured fishing brig and a prisoner on board *Hancock*, believed *Boston* fired into her after *Fox* had already struck. McNeill blamed the heat of the moment for confusion on the parts of *Fox*'s Marines or topmen who fired on him after he had ordered a burning wad to be thrown overboard from the chains. "There was no withholding our People," he explained, "and they return'd a few Shott before I could stop them."

The Americans set to work securing their prisoners and their prize.





## Signal Hostility

**I**MMEDIATELY FOLLOWING *Fox's* capture, the Continental frigates hoisted English colors again. By six o'clock that afternoon, nearly thirty sail of Banks fishermen—alerted by the morning gunfire—had collected in the vicinity seeking protection under what they imagined to be British guns.

In the meantime, because neither *Hancock's* nor *Fox's* boats had come through the action in seaworthy condition, McNeill sent his own aboard the prize. Had he done so simply to facilitate a formal surrender or to help transfer prisoners no further comment would be required, but there was more to it than that. He seems consistently to have ignored two principal considerations: that John Manley was his superior officer and that it had been Manley who had borne the brunt of the fighting which had disabled *Fox*. Instead, he evidently was preoccupied by the thought that had he not come to the rescue *Hancock* could now perfectly well be an English prize. So, when *Boston's* boats passed to *Fox*, his first and second lieutenants were comfortably seated in the sternsheets; the first with orders to take charge on board and the second instructed to bring off Captain Fotheringham.

The sources are not precise enough in their informa-

tion to explain why Fotheringham was first brought to *Boston* rather than being taken directly to the Commodore, but he was. Remarked *Boston's* Lieutenant of Marines William Jennison: "The Capt. of the *Fox* first came on board the *Boston*, but was ordered on board the Commodore's Ship much against Capt. Frothingham's [sic] Wishes, as Capt. McNeil was a more Gentlemanly Character than Commodore Manley."<sup>1</sup> How on earth could Fotheringham have formed such a judgment of a man he had never met unless preconditioned before leaving *Boston*? John Paul Jones and Hector McNeill were hardly the sum total of Manley's detractors: presumed friends, it seemed, delighted in gossipy insinuations; acknowledged enemies, like the English, considered him something of a pirate—in manner and bearing akin to the Kidds and the Lows and the Teaches of the past—in short, an Englishman gone bad: "a thieflike ugly dog," wrote one; a man possessed of "a savage courage, and a brutish ferocity of manners [which] had given him favour with the Rebel Government," in the words of another.<sup>2</sup>

McNeill's actions sat poorly with Manley, but he bided his time, merely accepting Fotheringham's sword when offered it and then going about his own business. Within hours of the capture, *Fox's* prisoners had been dispersed among the ships and *Fox* herself was being repaired by the prize crew. Both she and *Hancock* were a shambles in rigging and spars.

Prisoners to be looked after, fed, and guarded were the last things needed when everyone else was required to restore the ships' fighting efficiency before other British

cruisers hove their topgallants over the horizon. Toward evening, the Commodore himself appeared alongside *Boston* in one of the boats, but declined coming aboard owing to a lameness of an unspecified nature that would trouble him for some time to come. The prisoners, he shouted up to McNeill, all but one officer excluded, were to be placed immediately in the largest fishing vessel to be found in the area and allowed to depart for St. John's, Newfoundland, there to be exchanged for an equal number of American prisoners of war. The weather was deteriorating, the seas and wind were rising, so be quick about it.

McNeill protested vehemently, endeavoring all the while to entice him aboard to "tell him my thoughts on that Step," but Manley would not come and returned to his ship. By sunset, eighty-five men from *Fox* had been put aboard the fishing brig *Patty*. Worsening sea conditions prevented the embarkation of more or delaying the brig from sailing. By the next morning she had disappeared.

His thoughts swimming with the disastrous possibilities of Manley's decision, McNeill sat himself down to remonstrate in writing. Their posture, he protested, was now untenable, because the presence of the Continental frigates on the Newfoundland Banks was known not only to *Somerset*, which would spread the alarm as soon as she reached New York, but, worse still, by release of the prisoners from *Fox*, British authorities in Halifax or St. John's could be warned of them within twenty-four hours. Thus, their course home to Boston was in double jeopardy; Brit-

ish ships could already be forming a screen against their return. There was, McNeill believed, only one course to be followed. The frigates should steer for Charleston, South Carolina, rather than returning to Boston as instructed, and there join Captain Nicholas Biddle of the Continental frigate *Randolph*, refit and clean the ships, and then cruise for the British West India fleet until autumn, "by which time our own Coast would probably be clear and we might return without any risque compared with what must be now expected."<sup>3</sup>

Really one must tip the hat to him. On the one hand he was demonstrating a conservative, easy-does-it, even cowardly approach by which no battles could be joined nor laurels won, and yet, on the other hand, his reasoning was wholly reasonable. Logic is difficult to dispute, but it can be used also as a cloak to disguise indecision or incompetence. McNeill was always the victim of his own inflexibility; Manley, in contrast, was foolhardy, reasonable, and Commodore.

The ninth, tenth, and eleventh of June were largely consumed, while battle damage continued to be repaired, by the ships moving slowly eastward to approximately longitude 50° W and far enough south to avoid the main shipping routes from North America to Britain.

For a time, it seemed to McNeill that Manley subscribed wholeheartedly to his proposal about sailing to South Carolina; in fact, he became convinced of it following a conversation with Manley on board *Boston* on the eleventh, but the Commodore then "afterwards did as he pleas'd . . . In short we loiter'd away three weeks or a

month before we sett our faces homeward by which time the Coast of New England from Cape Sable as far as New York was so cover'd with cruisers that there was no escaping them."<sup>4</sup>

Manley's "Obstanicey and want of refflection at that period," included his refusal to permit *Boston's* first lieutenant, John Browne, to have the command of *Fox*. His insistence was an official rebuke of McNeill for his preemptive behavior, but his choice of the replacement officer from *Hancock* smacked of a personal slap in McNeill's face. In selecting the officer, Manley could have bypassed his own lieutenants altogether had he wished to, claiming the exigencies of the moment, by appointing his old comrade-in-arms from Washington's Navy, Daniel Waters—Waters, himself now a commissioned Continental Navy captain and aboard the flagship presumably as an unofficial flag captain cum sailing master, had been unable to secure a ship of his own before the start of Manley's cruise and so had joined him as a volunteer.

Instead, Manley appointed Lieutenant Stephen Hill, a man whose place on the lieutenants' list was far removed from that of Browne who was the fourth senior lieutenant in the service. "For the sake of peace," on 12 June, McNeill withdrew "M<sup>r</sup> Browne & the petty officers from on board the *Fox* they being much disconteded with M<sup>r</sup> Hills behaviour."<sup>5</sup>

During the week to follow, the three ships continued to cruise slowly eastward until they were less than 400 nautical miles from Flores, the westernmost island of the Azores. For part of the time they were accompanied by



Captains Gardner and Greeley in the privateer schooners *Active* and *Speedwell*, who had rejoined the squadron unexpectedly on the eleventh, but by the time the frigates turned westward again on the eighteenth of June both privateers had left them once more. Few other vessels were sighted. Those that were proved to be either Spanish or French.

“Unsettled Vile weather” ensued. Squalls, rain, gales with high seas, and fog plagued the vessels for the rest of June, all of which paired with Manley’s erratic courses caused McNeill to become infuriated at being “Obliged to cary Short Sail to the North<sup>d</sup> instead of makeing our way to the South<sup>d</sup> for a better countrey.” For two consecutive Sundays he “went on board Manley with the Officers of the *Fox* to dine with Capt Fotheringham.”<sup>6</sup> There was nothing else to do.

The matter of signals, or a lack of them, was a constant annoyance to McNeill, not only during the cruise itself but for months afterwards. “As for Signals,” he was to grumble to Thomas Thompson of *Raleigh*, “I never could get any” from Manley, and the Marine Committee was to be told: “Never did a Pilotfish follow a Sharke, or a Jackall follow a Lion, with more Assiduity and Complisance then I follow’d him at Sea for Six or Seven weeks (chiefly in bad weather Latitudes), and that without any regular System of Signals, or instructions for my direction dureing which time he led me into several Scrapes by his misconduct, and at last left me in one to shift for my self.”<sup>7</sup>

Just what Manley had or had not done about signals is hard to assess from the surviving documentation, but by

McNeill's own admission he had put McNeill to work on the problem even before the ships had left Massachusetts Bay, and McNeill's own records show that he, at least, made frequent use of the system evolved thereafter.

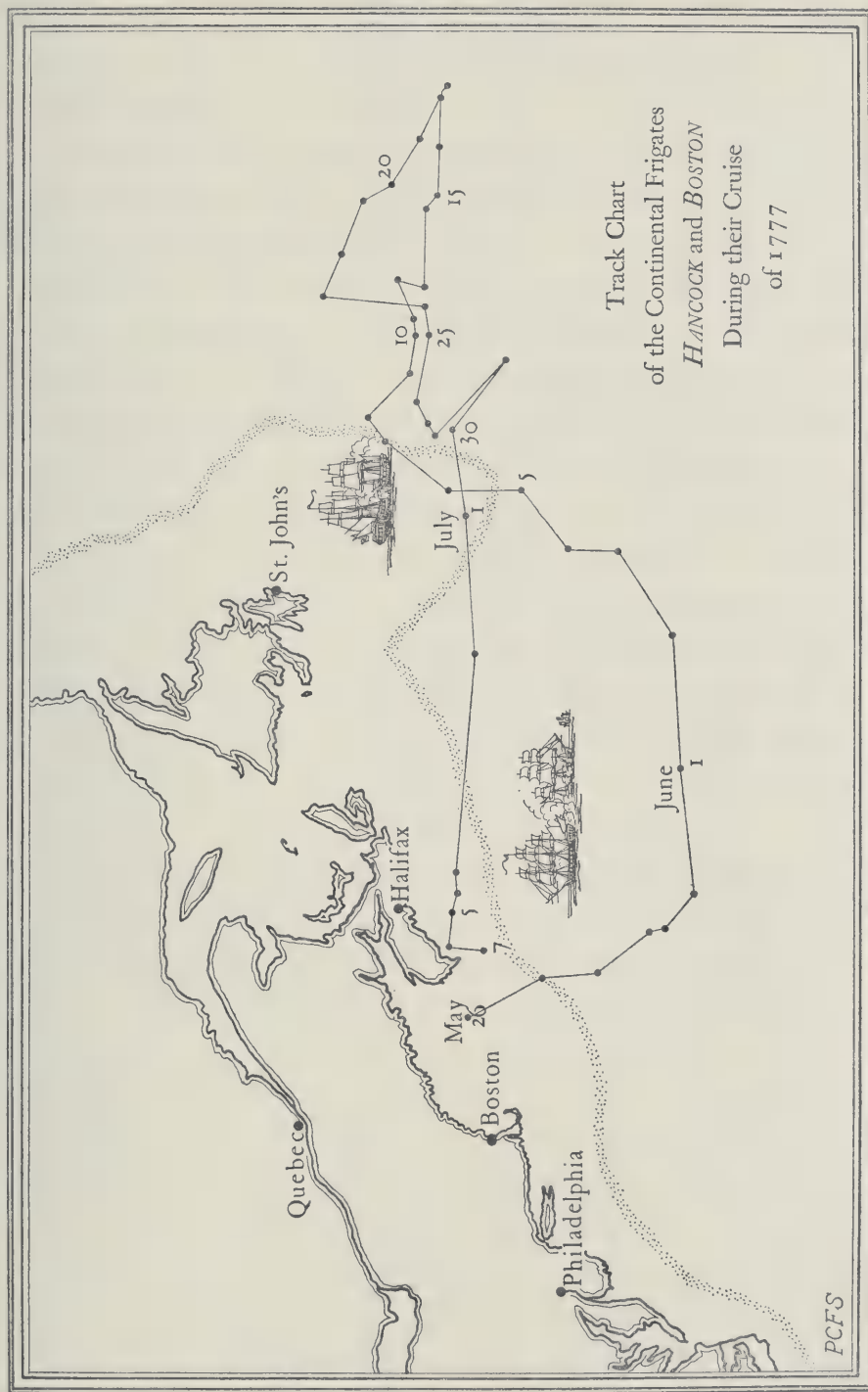
The whole pustule came to a head at the end of June when one evening after dark *Boston* very nearly collided with *Hancock*. McNeill reached for his writing desk and gave Manley "my mind freely on his misconduct which nettle'd the Commodore Verey much."<sup>8</sup> Manley's reply is one of his few surviving, descriptive letters and gives a feeling for him not achieved elsewhere.

By your Letter you tax me & my Officers for not showing proper Signals Past Night but I was upon Deck & made the Exat Signals you gave me which was by firing one Gun & showing three Lights which was for Tack & Sail with the Starbord Tacks on board if there is any mistake it is owing to your now [not?] giving me a true Copy I am much surprised that you should not observe the Signals when M<sup>r</sup> Hill did whom I gave an Exat Copy from your Signals but at the same time it cannot be supposed that your Officers knew the Signals when they never had seen them expecting some ill consequences I desired Capt<sup>n</sup> [Daniel] Waters to go foreward to look out & had it not have been for his hailing we certainly must have been aboard of each other you some time ago tax't me for being sparing of my Lights—I must now tax you for being sparing of your Canvas for you commonly keep a considerable distance astern altho' [as though] you was shy of our Comp[an]y I should think it more proper especially in foggy weather when there is a good breeze of Wind that we can Command our Ships to keep within hail of each other or so near as that we can hear the Bells strike as for the *Fox* she keeps so nigh that I can distinguish her Bell in the Cabin every Night as well as I can my own if you will go a head I will be bound to keep

Comp<sup>y</sup> with you & be close upon your Qua[r]ter or so nigh that it Will be impossable to loose Each other. you mention of not standing upon Sounding [i.e., turning for home] which I Join with you but I think it will not be of any advantage to stand on this Tack after we break off from South, I am very Anctious to get home since I am very lame myself and destitute of officers.<sup>9</sup>

As for fog signals, he went on, "it would be necessary when the foregoing Signals is made for Tacking for thee Sternmost & Weathermost Ship to Tack first & when she is about to [to] repeat the Signal." The last time McNeill had dined aboard *Hancock* he had caught his right leg while returning aboard *Boston* between the ship's side and the boat, a most painful experience. "I am sorry you met with that Accident in going aboard," Manley sympathized, "hope your Leg is better, am afraid I cannot wait on you next Sunday on Account of my [own] Lameness for I am now laying upon my beem ends & what is worse than that I cannot drink neither, Punch Wine nor Grog—Yrs John Manley."

On the day following, 28 June, McNeill penned another diatribe "concerning our Signal, & Standing so much to the North." The timing of this, when compared to the rough track of the ship's progress, is interesting because one is inclined to suspect that Manley had become sick and tired of McNeill's constant abuse and was now playing games with him. Look at the accompanying chart of their track, from the twenty-eighth of June to the thirtieth, and observe the long dogleg to the southeast. There is no practical explanation from the surviving records to account for it—no documents mention the chasing of ves-



sels or any other extraordinary event at that time. In fact, it was thick with fog except for one brief clearing off on the thirtieth. The wind, which shifted only from west to southwest by west, does not explain it. "Obliged to keep company by guns," McNeill griped to himself in his journal, a comment he immediately contradicted by the statement: "foggy troublesome w[eathe]<sup>r</sup> to keep company without Signals." Could it be that Manley, upon receiving yet another broadside for his failure to sail south had, in fact, then sailed south—for fifty leagues or so before then sailing fifty leagues or so north—simply for the sport of irritating McNeill even more?

From retracing the dogleg on the thirtieth of June, the ships' track took a steady westerly direction following roughly the parallel of latitude  $43^{\circ}$  N., a course calculated to pass well to the south of the treacherous bars of Sable Island yet not so much as to miss making a landfall at Cape Sable, the southernmost headland of Nova Scotia. By this time, stores were beginning to run out because the frigates had been provisioned for only a month's cruise. Aboard *Boston*, the water allowance had been reduced to two quarts per man per day on the twenty-sixth.

"On our return from the Banks," wrote Lieutenant of Marines Jennison, "it was very Foggy on the Coast of Nova Scotia and a Rocket was frequently fired to discover the proximity of our Ships—A little to the Eastward of Halifax the Fog being very dense Capt. McNeil spoke the Commodore & enquired whether he would ring the Bells as usual, who replied Yes, if all the British Navy was near him. . . ." <sup>10</sup> The ships were attempting to maintain a strict



sailing order: *Fox* ahead, *Hancock* in the center and *Boston* in the rear.

About dawn on 6 July, a brief rain squall shifted the wind into the north, clearing off the fog. The masthead lookouts made land on the horizon ahead, correctly assumed to be the coast of Nova Scotia between Cape Sable and Halifax. Before long, a sail was observed in the west-southwest, which the frigates bore down on and discovered to be the small sloop *Britannia*, commanded by a Captain Hinkston, laden with coal for Halifax from the mines at Spanish River<sup>11</sup> on Cape Breton Island. Making a prize of her, Manley took her in tow of *Hancock*. McNeill by this time was nearly beside himself, and it wasn't long before *Boston's* pinnacle was headed for the flagship with a letter, the contents of which unfortunately are unknown. "We Lost severall hours dallying with the Sloop," he was still fuming weeks afterwards, "untill the Morning breeze which was at N[orth] was Spent."

Finally, they all stood off to the southwest. Toward late afternoon, further sails were sighted far astern, sails that grew larger before night. Hector McNeill's worst fears were on the verge of coming true.





## Perfidy

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THE SAILS when first seen by the frigates were mere specks on the horizon, but specks which grew more and more visible during the remaining hours of daylight. They belonged to H.M. frigate *Rainbow*, forty-four guns, Captain Sir George Collier in command. A few miles astern of her, out of sight to Manley and McNeill, was her consort, the ten-gun brig *Victor*, commanded by one of *Rainbow*'s lieutenants. *Rainbow*, for nearly a year the principal station ship in Halifax harbor, had sailed from Halifax on a cruise the very day Manley's squadron had passed it in the fog.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the forthcoming account of the long chase, fighting, and ultimate disaster for the Americans, the reader constantly must keep in mind the fact that some of the combatant vessels were never sure of each others' exact identity. This may seem strange until it is understood that at that day ships of war were not covered with identifying numbers and did not necessarily even have names painted on them. For a fighting vessel, which might have numerous occasions to practice deceptions upon a presumed enemy, this makes excellent sense, but the available information about visible names is confusing and contradictory. One of the four paintings which

depict the action about to be described clearly shows *Rainbow* with a name on her stern. Perhaps this is artistic license; perhaps it is not. In any event, although *Rainbow* correctly second-guessed *Hancock* for what she was, *Hancock* did not know *Rainbow*'s name until it was all over. There is a strong possibility, moreover, that throughout the fighting Manley believed her to be another, and much more powerful, adversary altogether.

When *Rainbow*'s lookouts first observed sails ahead in the west, the distance and relatively low afternoon sun angle made it impossible to form an accurate judgment of what they were or of what force they might be. Sir George Collier, nevertheless, made additional sail to investigate and signaled *Victor* to keep up. By sunset, he had gained upon them sufficiently to see they were large ships. Because the wind was blowing from the west-northwest and they were sailing close to it, he concluded they were bound for a port in New England. He therefore continued chasing all night, the ship cleared for action the whole time and his men at their quarters in case Manley, whose force he was beginning to suspect it to be, attempted an attack during the night.

Sir George Collier was a shrewd, experienced naval officer, then thirty-nine years of age. In 1751, at thirteen, he had entered the Navy as a midshipman, at sixteen he had been appointed a lieutenant, at twenty-three a commander, and at twenty-four he had been posted to the rank of captain. Since that time, he had commanded the frigates *Bologne*, *Tweed*, *Levant* and *Flora*, as well as the guardship *Edgar* at Plymouth, and now, since December

1775, *Rainbow*. His knighthood and the production of his dramatic romance, *Selima and Azor* (an adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*), at the Drury Lane Theatre, London, in 1776, although unconnected, occurred at very much the same time. He was a man of many parts and a man destined for high flag rank. He was also a formidable opponent. Manley would have done well to attack him during the night.

But Manley did not attack. He should have. He should have marshalled the superior forces under his control and rid himself of this adversary once and for all. Had he done so, his position would have been invulnerable when another enemy hove into view the next morning. Perhaps McNeill had been right about him after all, although it is hard to imagine McNeill taking the initiative himself when his previous history had always been to hang from danger in order to fight a better fight another day. Sir George was of the opinion that the American captains “deserved the names of errant poltroons for not attacking the *Rainbow* the night they first saw her.”

When dawn came, 7 July, the Continental frigates and *Fox* were still sailing in a ragged line on almost the identical course they had been sailing at dusk the night before. “Manley towed the Sloop all Night,” McNeill complained bitterly, “and we to keep astern—had our Miz’n Topsail to the Mast half the Night.” As the light of day began to turn grey shadows into solid reality, lookouts aboard Manley’s frigates perceived *Rainbow* only five or six miles astern. *Victor*, by nature a dull sailer, had fallen so far behind she was almost out of sight. She would not

figure in the proceedings for the next twenty-four hours.

The course of the Americans was something between west by south and southwest. *Rainbow* bore to the east of them, on the same course and closing.

Dawn revealed another sail, before now unobserved in the southwest, standing away into the receding gloom, but at 4:30 A.M., the newcomer, having seen the Americans (although not knowing what they were), altered course to reconnoiter. *Fox*, *Hancock*, and *Boston*—in that order—were strung out over a number of miles. McNeill misinterpreted the vessel ahead as a companion of *Rainbow* which had headreached on the fleet during the night. She was, in fact, H.M. frigate *Flora*, Captain John Brisbane. Since her arrival off Boston in June 1776, she had participated in naval operations around New York, had done convoy duty between New York and Halifax, and now was cruising out of Newport, Rhode Island, after a winter refit in the Leeward Islands. Stumbling upon Manley had been purely accidental.

Brisbane was the man who later commissioned the four paintings. He was destined for even higher flag rank than Sir George Collier whom he had trailed by thirty-seven months in his appointment to lieutenant yet had preceded in his posting to captain by nearly ten months. He had commanded the sloop of war *Nightingale* and the frigates *Echo*, *Cerberus*, and finally Sir George's old vessel, *Flora*. A hard-nosed professional, he once responded to the criticism that had he chased Manley's squadron much longer he would have been off his station by saying, "that such a consideration was totally out of the question when

he was in pursuit of an enemy; that the chase might run to the West Indies, or to the devil, if he chose it, but that he would follow him as long as he could carry an inch of canvass."

With the Americans setting every sail that could be useful to them and going off in a line of battle, Sir George Collier watched *Flora* (which he never recognized) in the southeast standing toward the fleet. Manley was now divesting himself of the prize sloop by casting her off and torching her. Soon, she was "blazing fiercely." It had taken *Flora* several hours to reach *Fox*, the lead ship, but finally she passed her to leeward at point-blank shot. As she did so, *Flora* hoisted a red ensign and fired two twelve-pounders to leeward, attempting to make *Fox* show her own colors. She did not. Sir George, despite observing the English red ensign and hearing the reports of *Flora*'s guns, nevertheless believed her to be another of Manley's fleet. She had bent on no private recognition signal to identify herself otherwise to *Rainbow*.

Continuing to leeward along the American line on an opposing course, *Flora* passed all three, crossed their wakes, tacked, and joined the line in pursuit. The Americans hoisted Continental colors, and soon afterwards McNeill opened fire with his stern chasers. Brisbane returned it briskly. *This is the situation represented by the first of the paintings.*

Two things must be understood about this first view. The artist, instead of showing *Fox* in the lead of *Hancock*, unintentionally reversed their positions, an error that is the one major failing of the series. One other point must



be made with respect to the set in general but to the first canvas in particular. Everything has been tremendously condensed and foreshortened as if viewed through an extremely powerful telescope, a necessity forced upon the artist by the physical limitations of his medium. By no means were the five ships bunched together at the time. It took *Flora* an hour and a half to cover the distance between *Fox* and *Boston's* wake, for in reality the line was stretched out over several miles. The actual distance between *Rainbow* and *Flora*, for example, once *Flora* had tacked into their wake, was a minimum of four miles. Had the artist backed off sufficiently to depict the scene in its true perspective, the ships would have become a stuttering of splotches upon a distant horizon.

The exchange of gunfire between the last two ships came as a considerable surprise to Sir George Collier who then ordered St. George's colors to be shown and a gun fired to leeward as a signal to *Flora* that he at last recognized her to be a King's ship. The rebels, he thought, "seemed irresolute, and undecided, both as to their course, and conduct."

He was right. All the animosities, arrogance, jealousies, and bickering that had nourished the seed planted so long ago at Newburyport had now produced a tough, parasitic vine that gripped both men immobile. McNeill would not take Manley's orders; Manley would not accept McNeill's advice. Each held the other in the highest contempt and neither would listen to anything the other proposed. As Commodore, Manley would have to shoulder the blame for the failures of the fleet whether he had been

personally responsible or not. He had already committed a severe strategic error by not having turned to engage *Rainbow* in the night; nevertheless, it is probable that not only the lack of personal communication with McNeill had contributed to that failure but also the imperfectly digested signal system which already had caused so much difficulty.

The breakdown in whatever system they had managed to evolve was completed before noon. Apparently lacking the ability to communicate fluently at a distance by means of signal flags—whether because the system was insufficiently flexible or because the various officers did not know how to read it—Manley was obliged to give his orders by voice. With *Flora* in hot pursuit of him, McNeill finally was able to come within hail of the Commodore. Manley proposed tacking simultaneously—*Fox*, *Hancock*, and *Boston* together—to engage *Flora* before *Rainbow* had time to get within effective range. For once, McNeill agreed.

*Hancock* and *Boston* tacked, but *Fox* did not. McNeill, cursing “that Fellow of yesterday, Mr. Stephen Hill, whom he [Manley] promoted over all Other Officers’ heads to Command the *Fox*,” found himself with Manley to leeward of the oncoming *Flora*. Manley opened fire as *Flora* passed McNeill. All three then began a heated exchange that lasted for some minutes. *The second painting depicts that stage of the action.*

Two to five broadsides were fired—the accounts vary. *Flora* had managed to hull *Boston* in three places below the waterline, exclusive of inconsequential damage to the

top-hamper, and had accomplished similar damage to *Hancock*. It was enough to slow them down, for neither could tack upon her again after she passed them until they had plugged their shot holes. Thus, *Flora* got between them and *Fox* with impunity. Had *Fox* tacked with the others, she might well have made her escape by weathering them all.

*Flora* stood on after *Fox* and opened fire, which was returned, but during the chase *Fox* kept altering her course as if looking for a hole. At length, she attempted to tack as she ought to have done long before, but in the light airs she hadn't sufficient headway, missed stays, and was obliged instead to wear, which brought her under *Flora*'s lee and into a raking situation. They exchanged broadsides as they passed each other.

By this time, *Rainbow*, after more than twenty hours of contact with Manley, had almost come within range at last, but not quite. *Hancock* and *Boston* were still stopping their shot holes.

After *Fox* wore, *Flora* tacked to follow her. *Rainbow* did too, and in passing *Fox* fired several well-pointed shot into her. As the two British ships drew abreast of each other and hailed they finally discovered exactly who they were. Manley and McNeill, meanwhile, had completed their immediate repairs.

Manley, seeing *Fox* beyond saving and *Flora* completely preoccupied by her, put about and stood southwest, evidently intending to maintain his position to windward of *Rainbow*. Certainly he expected McNeill to follow him, as probably they had discussed while hove to, because the

two of them together could now dispose of her as they should have done the night before. Instead, as Lieutenant of Marines William Jennison put it, the approach of *Rainbow* within range "caused Captn. McNeil to consult his Officers whether to follow the commodore after the strange Ship which was afterwards known to be the *Rainbow* of 44 guns, the only ship in the Halifax station with a Poop, which gave reason to suspect she was a Ship of the Line." McNeill concluded *not* to join Manley.

To Sir George Collier, it became evident as the American ships exploded into different points of the compass that inevitably one must escape. He knew for certain which was Manley. One of his midshipmen, now they were close enough, recognized *Hancock* from having seen her at anchor while he was a prisoner of war at Boston. Sir George altered his course to attend to the Commodore. *The third painting demonstrates the proceedings at that point.*

About 4:30 that afternoon, *Flora* overhauled *Fox* and poured shot into her with her bow chasers. A short time later, Lieutenant Stephen Hill struck the Continental colors to Captain John Brisbane. Only then did they learn each others' identity. *Painting number four illustrates the surrender.*

By dark, as *Flora's* boats brought off the prisoners from *Fox*, *Boston* was as far to windward of them as anyone could see, only the head of her topsails showing over the horizon. *Rainbow* and *Hancock* had vanished from sight long before.



## Recriminations

MANLEY'S ZEAL to rescue his cruise from disaster by overwhelming *Rainbow* turned to impotent rage when he observed the departure of McNeill "whom Manley execrated with many oaths, for his cowardice in not assisting him." His only escape now lay in speed. *Hancock*, he was painfully aware, was foul from months of growths, yet he knew she was still uncommonly swift. Captain Fotheringham of *Fox*, still in *Hancock* as a prisoner, knew it too: she frequently had logged as much as thirteen knots during the time he had been aboard.

For some time, Sir George Collier was apprehensive that despite *Rainbow*'s recent careening at Halifax *Hancock* would outsail him and be lost from sight during the night. An hour before sunset, however, Manley suddenly altered course and kept away large. Attempting to make his ship sail faster, he had started the water butts in the forehold, but instead of producing the desired effect the experiment had thrown her out of trim. If she behaved as *Boston* is known to have done, she sailed best close-hauled on an even keel and before the wind somewhat deeper aft than forward. Starting the water and pumping it out had lightened her head well enough, but combined with other factors of trim and sailing eccentricities no longer known



the net effect was to reduce her speed. Despite Manley's course changes and "all the doublings and finesse usual on such occasions," Sir George was enabled to keep him in sight all night. By midnight, in fact, they were within musket shot of each other.

First light revealed to Manley not only *Rainbow* about a mile astern but also a brig a short distance to leeward. She was *Rainbow's* consort, the ten-gun brig *Victor*, which had never been able to come close enough to join the action the day before. Because of the "doublings and finesse" during the night she happened to be in the right spot by morning. In passing *Hancock*, she fired her battery into her, killing a man at the wheel, and then fell off unable to come up again due to her indifferent sailing qualities. *Rainbow* opened fire with bow chasers, yawing from time to time to let off six, nine, and eighteen-pounders loaded with round shot and grape as they bore. Some of them struck home.

After four hours of doling out such medicine, *Rainbow* closed to within hailing distance, and acquainted "them that if they expected quarters they must strike immediately, Manley took a few minutes to consider, and a fresher breeze just then springing up, he availed himself of it, by attempting to set some of the steering sails on the other side." Sir George "therefore poured a number of shot into him, which brought him to the desired determination, and he struck the rebel colours a little before 9 o'clock in the morning, after a chase of upwards of thirty-nine hours."

Little enough is known of John Manley's rage and de-

spair as he was brought aboard *Rainbow*, but one is reminded of another episode to touch him a few years later when he was taken prisoner again. That time when he was brought onto the deck of his captor to deliver up his sword half the rim of his hat had been shot off. "You have had a narrow escape, Manley," the English captain remarked. "I wish to God it had been my head," he replied.<sup>1</sup>

"Manley seemed much chagrined," one British account said, "at his not having engaged the *Rainbow* when he found she was but a 40 gun ship, as he had all along mistaken her for the *Raisonable*, whom he knew was very lately at Louisbourg . . . The taking of Manley will be of the utmost bad consequence to the rebels, he being the chief executive officer of their navy, in whom the Congress place all their confidence, and who is the only man of real courage they have by sea—His loss will be full as severe a stroke upon them as that of General Lee."



As for Hector McNeill, his cornucopia of troubles was to wreck his life. For the next five weeks or more he holed up in the Sheepscot River on the coast of Maine, not daring to sail lest one of the vast numbers of English cruisers he imagined to be in search of him found him. It was late August before he finally returned to Boston.

His pen was never still during this and forthcoming periods, fulminating over Manley's ignorance, obstinacy, and overbearing nature, all the while professing to "hold it criminal to asperse the character of any man, much more the Absent, and in some cases Scarcely Justi-

fiable to Speak all the Truth, for which reasons were I not under a Necessity I should now say very little of Capt. Manley, but inasmuch as I find my self involved in a chain of difficultys by his blunders and misconduct, I must in justice to my self say, That . . .” and on it would go.

Among his officers there was deep discontent, “who it is said,” James Warren wrote to John Adams in early September, “will not again go to sea with him, and who say he never will again man his ship.” Captain of Marines Richard Palmes, whom McNeill considered a “composition of the Fool and Knave,” he placed under arrest for an actual breach of orders. Sailing Master Lawrence Furlong he raked over the coals, being assured by McNeill that “I am not that blockhead of yesterday you vainly imagine,” for an independent attitude. John Browne, the first lieutenant, whom he had tried to press on Manley as prize master of *Fox*, declined giving McNeill a written statement whether or not he intended to remain with the ship and so later was charged by his captain with neglect of duty and suspended.

“Capt. McNeill’s reputation on his first appointment,” Warren continued to Adams, “was extremely good; it seems to be now reversed. The last cruise was at first very successful, but did not end so. There was certainly great blame somewhere. I won’t pretend to say where. He lays it on Manley, as you may see by his letters to the Marine Committee; while his officers dont scruple to say that if he had followed Manley’s orders we might have had not only the *Fox*, but the *Flora* and *Rainbow*.”

A month later, Warren wrote of McNeill’s “overbear-

ing haughtiness and unlimited conceit." By the end of the year 1777 he was suspended from the command of *Boston*.

Manley had been carried in *Rainbow* directly to Halifax and from thence soon after to New York on board the frigate *Syren* which was sent to inform Admiral Lord Howe of the action. There, he was confined on board H.M.S. *St. Albans*, unable to effect an exchange for himself until March 1778 when he returned to Boston.

The courts-martial of Manley and McNeill took place later that summer. The Commodore was acquitted and McNeill was cashiered from the service.



## Postscriptum

Captain Patrick Fotheringham died in 1784. *Fox*, under another captain, was captured off Brest in 1778 by the French frigate *Junon*.

Captain John Brisbane attained the rank of Admiral of the Red in 1805 and died in 1807. In 1778, he had been forced to scuttle *Flora* at Rhode Island to prevent her capture. The Americans, however, raised and repaired her before selling her to the French who employed her as the privateer *Flore*.

Sir George Collier climbed in promotion to Vice Admiral of the Blue, a rank he held but nine months before he died in 1795. *Rainbow*, which was thirty years old when commanded by him, was not sold out of the Royal Navy for almost as many more, ending her days in 1802. She was the first ship to be armed entirely with carronades.

*Hancock's* (or, rather, John Manley's) broad pendant was sent to England and presented to King George III. The ship was purchased into the Royal Navy as H.M. frigate *Iris* and served in the American campaign until captured by the French in 1781. She ultimately was used at Toulon as a powder hulk where she was blown up by the British in 1793.

*Boston* was commanded after McNeill for two and a half years by Captain Samuel Tucker of Marblehead, Manley's successor as "commodore" of George Washington's Navy. *Boston* remained under his command until May 1780 when she was ceded to the British by the capitula-



tion of Charleston, South Carolina. She was then taken into the Royal Navy as H.M. frigate *Charlestown* but was sold out at the end of the war and, presumably, broken up.

Hector McNeill never again commanded a Continental vessel. He spent a number of years trying to clear himself but never really succeeded in doing so and during the last few years of the war dabbled with privateering ventures. On Christmas night 1785, he was lost at sea.

John Manley was the epitome of the "hard-luck" captain. No Continental vessels being available for him at the time of his acquittal, he turned to privateering. In January 1779, he was captured for a second time, carried to Barbados and imprisoned there for over four months until he contrived an escape. Returning to Boston, he took command of the privateer ship *Jason* and was captured a third time. He was confined at Mill Prison, Plymouth, England, for more than two years. Finally, he was appointed to the command of the Continental frigate *Hague*, one of the last of the Continental Navy ships, and served in her for thirteen months, by which time the war had ended and she was sold out. Manley died at Boston on 12 February 1793. Three United States Navy vessels have since borne his name.

## The Paintings

The four paintings that have caused this book to be written were discovered in 1964 during the course of a visit to a home in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, by Mr. Basil C. Skinner, at that time Assistant Keeper of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. Until then, their existence had been known only to the owners who had no particular interest in them. Mr. Skinner's visit was part of the Survey of Pictures in Private Collections in Scotland, in the performance of which he visited a dozen or so private homes a year and became adept at discovering many pictures considered unfashionable and stowed away out of sight. "One could not fail to be aware," he commented about such occasions, "that many extremely interesting pictures had—over the generations—been removed from the walls of the main rooms, stored away in attics or out-houses, and often forgotten. . . . My developing practice was therefore invariably to ask politely to see any storerooms in the house visited after I had been shown the main rooms in occupation."

At Culcreuch, it was much the same. After lunching with the family and taking note of the pictures on view, he "eventually went up to the roof-storerooms. There, along with various engravings, I found the four paintings" and had "to remove a certain quantity of dust and old plaster off them and their frames before I could see what they were." Recognizing their importance, despite the dust and mildew, but not the specific naval engagement they represented, Mr. Skinner arranged to return with a photographer.

That July, photographic prints were dispatched to Mr. Edward H. H. Archibald, then Curator of Oil Paintings at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England. Could he possibly identify the action? The family, Mr. Skinner informed him, were directly descended from Admirals John and Sir Charles Brisbane, so, in all likelihood, the paintings had something to do with the careers of one or the other. The canvases measured 24" x 36½" and were signed "F×Holman 1779."

Of Francis Holman, the artist, surprisingly little is known, although a number of his works still exist, but he became one of the London Thames-side artists in the company of the Cleveleys, Serres, Swain, and others, who made their mark and "enjoyed a contemporary reputation." Said to be a Cornishman, Holman lived variously at Shadwell and Wapping, flourished from 1767 to 1790 when he died, and exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1774 to 1784. Thomas Luny may have been his pupil.

With such clues available, Mr. Archibald was enabled to identify the event and the ships involved. It seemed quite reasonable to conclude that John Brisbane had commissioned them inasmuch as the last of the series depicts his *Flora* capturing another frigate.

It is not known to the present writer to what extent questions were raised in 1964 about the sources of Holman's information in 1779, but it is a subject that must be considered briefly. As for the ships he was obliged to paint, he could well have seen every one of them but *Bos-*

ton. *Fox*, or at least frigates very much like her, would have presented him with no problem, *Flora* and *Rainbow* had fitted out for America at his doorstep on the Thames, and *Hancock* (now *Iris*) arrived in England during March of 1779. Brisbane himself was there too, for after being obliged to scuttle *Flora* in 1778 he returned home where he remained until appointed to the command of *Alcide* in 1780. The essential gears therefore mesh. He certainly provided Holman with detailed descriptions and possibly even sketches of the tactical evolutions and wind directions during the day. Their overall validity as documents will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

The owner of the paintings decided to sell, but the American maritime museum (*not* the Peabody Museum) to which they were first offered eventually answered: "we do not find the subject of sufficient interest to warrant purchase and the cost of necessary restoration"! This rebuff caused the suspension of their sale, and for a while the series was on loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Finally, a decision was made to let them go on the block at one of the London auction rooms. They appeared as items 126 and 127 in Sotheby's *Catalogue of Fine 18th and 19th Century Drawings and Paintings* for the sale of 13 July 1966.

Why they were split up is a mystery, but they were—the first and the last of the series as one lot; the second and third as another. One pair was acquired jointly by two American galleries; the other by a London dealer. When the one set was delivered to the United States, its impor-

tance was recognized instantly by Mr. Charles D. Childs, whose gallery had been a co-purchaser. He immediately set out to track down the pair still in England and fortunately was able to reunite all four.

After necessary repair and restoration, they were acquired by a private Massachusetts collector who, after agonizing over them for almost a decade, ultimately decided his home was not the place for them and put them back on the market.

Because of their great significance, the extreme rarity of paintings of the war at sea during the American Revolution actually done at the time, and the many Essex County historical associations they elicit, Captain John Brisbane's four oil paintings were acquired by the Peabody Museum of Salem during the Bicentennial month of July 1976.



With respect to *Hancock* and *Boston* themselves, historians had always known somewhat more about *Hancock* because her lines and deck plan existed in England from measurements taken off several years after her capture. *Boston* never returned to England until the end of the war, was immediately sold out, and so never was dissected in the same way. Except for McNeill's little sketches of the action, no contemporaneous representation of *Boston* was known until the Holman paintings were found.

The contract for building the two is reproduced in Chapter 2. Some other descriptive material may help to assess the validity of the paintings.

Their general appearance during the engagement was

reported by Sir George Collier to Admiral Lord Howe in July 1777 (Adm. 1/487, f. 496, at the Public Record Office, London). *Hancock* was described as follows:

A mans head with yellow breeches white stockings blue coat with yellow button holes small cocked hat with yellow lace has a mast in lieu of an ensign staff with a latteen sail on it has a fore and aft driver boom with another across two top gallant royal masts pole mizzen topmast a whole mizzen yard and mounts 32 guns, has a rattle snake carved on the stern netting all round the ship stern black & yellow quarter galleries all yellow.

This same report gives some of her more important dimensions.

Length on the upper deck	140'	8"
Breadth on the upper deck	30'	2"
Length of keel for tonnage	116'	2 3/4"
Extreme breadth	35'	2"
Depth in the hold	10'	7"
Burthen in tons	764	
Height between decks	5'	6"
Height in the waist	5'	0"
Size of gun ports fore & aft	2'	7"
up & down	2'	2"
Length on the quarterdeck	57'	8"
Length on the forecastle	31'	3"
Draft of the water afore	14'	0"
abaft	15'	10"
Height of ports from the surface		
of the water   forward	9'	0"
midships	8'	2"
abaft	9'	2"

These may be compared with the principal dimensions



specified on the draught taken off by the Plymouth Dockyard in 1779 (Admiralty Collection of Draughts No. 2285, Box 38, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich):

Length on the range of the lower deck	136' 7"
Length of the keel for tonnage	115' 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ "
Breadth extreme	35' 2"
Depth of hold	11' 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Burthen in tons	674 $\frac{42}{94}$

The above report also describes *Boston's* appearance, but, of course, no dimensions were known.

An Indian Head with a Bow and Arrow in the hand painted white red and yellow two top gallant royal masts pole mizzen top mast on which she hoists a top gallant sail painted nearly like the *Hancock* with the netting all round has a garf [gaff] a mast in room of an ensign staff with a lateen sail on it and mounts 30 guns.

*Boston's* principal dimensions are believed to have been 114' 3" length along the berth deck, 94' 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " length of keel, 32' extreme breadth, and 10' 3" depth of hold. Her tonnage is stated as 575 tons (H.C.A. 32/284 at the Public Record Office, London). Just prior to her capture in 1780, her armament probably consisted of thirty guns (considerably more than her official twenty-four), most of which were nine-pounders, and seven swivels. When under McNeill, in contrast, her battery amounted to five twelve-pounders, nineteen nines, two sixes, four fours, and sixteen swivels. As for her rigging, much can be deduced from the list of boatswain's stores expended for various purposes between 11 April and 23 August 1779 in the

Samuel Tucker Papers at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.\*

Hector McNeill was never able to determine *Boston's* dimensions from her agent, builder, or mast maker. "I will make it my Business," he declared, "to Measure the Ship whenever an opportunity offers." He never had the opportunity before being relieved of command. He did, however, provide a statement to the Marine Committee of her overall performance after his cruise:

In the first place I think something ought to be done in the Standing of her masts, to try if it may not have a good Effect on her Sailing; her bottom is allow'd to be as fine as any thing of the kind will admitt of. We have alter'd her Trim frequently and find great difference in her going, but yet we never have been able to make her go as fast as some other Ships we have fallen in with. One great hope I have that she is cappable of Sailing fast is That She is the most Ticklish Ship to keep in trim that ever I was acquainted with, for I have repeatedly found that the unequal Expence of one days Provisions and water would put her out of Trim. From this circumstance I am Persuaded that She will One day Sail fast if her Trim can be discover'd. One great disadvantage we have had in Trimming her, is that we had little or none pigg Ballast wherewith to make the Experiment, consequently when we have been Obligated to alter, the men and Guns was our only resource, both of which bring great inconveniencys, to the one being as defecult to keep Still in the place you want them, as the other is to transport fore and aft.

2dly. Such a quantity of Gravel Ballast as we are Obligated to cary to Stiffen the Ship, takes up a great deal of our room (of

\* For more about *Boston* while under Captain Samuel Tucker, see Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, *Captain Samuel Tucker (1747-1833)*, *Continental Navy* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1976), pp. 39-74.

which there is but too Little at best) then being mixd in with the water Casks fore and aft, it composes such a dead Mass that a Ship thus ballast[ed] feels her self no more then an Island, and as it Layes so much higher then Pigg Ballast the weight deepens a Ship more then it Stiffens her for carying Sail, consequently when her body is in the water like a Loaded Vessell, 'tis not possible for her to Sail so fast. This I have frequently found by our Ship, her being commonly so deep That when ever we have press'd her with Sail She has gone less Swift then before.

To go best close haul'd she ought to be on an even keel That is 14 feet 3 inches forw'r and aft. To go Large, or afore the wind, She must be 10 or 12 inches deeper aft then forward, and there is not a good property a Ship can have (Except room within, and Speed of foot) but this Ship may boast of. When brought to her courses upon a wind She proved a much more weatherly Ship then the *Hancock*, but in fine weather the *Hancock* bore the bill.

This was Hector McNeill at his professional best, the man John Paul Jones had said "inherits more *Marine Knowledge* than any other Man."



In summary of the historical accuracy of Holman's paintings, it may be said that he was well-briefed about the appearance of the ships, their positions overall, and their sailing evolutions. By and large, they are remarkably close to the written accounts from all sides; only a few inconsistencies can now be detected.

The most serious of these, as previously mentioned, is the transposition of the actual places of *Hancock* and *Fox* in the first canvas. There are, however, some other shady areas which must be borne in mind by any student using the series as a precise historical document.

According to Sir George Collier, for instance, *Hancock* had “a fore and aft driver boom.” Its presence is suggested in Number one, but not in two or three. Four is inconclusive. *Boston*, in contrast, had a gaff. So it shows in Numbers one, two, and four, but three presents a lateen spar. Because the vessel in the space actually occupied by *Boston* once has fourteen ports to a side on the gundeck and once thirteen, as opposed to thirteen twice and fourteen once for *Hancock*, it must be taken under consideration whether or not Holman may have been confused by the two Continental vessels.

Similar difficulties are to be seen in a close study of *Fox* and *Flora*. Some of this is probably the fault of the modern conservators who resurrected the pictures from their mildewed condition, yet not all. Examination of them by ultraviolet light reveals most restoration to have taken place in areas of the sky.

These are but observations. A definitive study of the rigging is another undertaking and is not intended to be encompassed by the present work.

Withal, Francis Holman’s delineations of the events of 7 July 1777 are a remarkable legacy from an era when the glass plate and the photographic image had yet to come. What more could we ask for?



# Notes

## Chapter 1. *Two Captains*

1. Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813) of Marblehead* (Boston and Salem, 1973), II, 519.
2. Isaac J. Greenwood, *Captain John Manley* (Boston, 1915) and Robert E. Peabody, "The Naval Career of Captain John Manley of Marblehead," Essex Institute *Historical Collections*, vol. 45.
3. Oath of Thomas Hardy, skipper of the Banking brig *Polly*, Adm. 1/471, f. 119, at the Public Record Office, London.
4. Information provided the author, October 1976, by the kindness of the Reverend Michael Malsom, M.A., St. Marychurch Vicarage, Torquay. Other children of Robert Manley born there were Michael (bpt. 19 October 1726), Mary (bpt. 24 June 1728), and Robert (bpt. 16 May 1735).
5. John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes, 12 January 1777, reproduced in William Bell Clark and William James Morgan, eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D. C., 1964- ), VII, 937.
6. *Naval Documents*, III, 145.
7. Mention of Washington's two South Shore vessels is here omitted for simplicity.
8. *Naval Documents*, II, 1154.
9. Gardner W. Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," Massachusetts Historical Society *Proceedings*, vol. 55.
10. McNeill's early commands may be traced through the Boston Naval Office records, copies at the Peabody Museum of Salem.

## Chapter 2. *A Marshalling of Forces*

1. Stephen Moylan to William Watson, 13 December 1775, in *Naval Documents*, III, 81.
2. Stephen Moylan to Col. Joseph Reed, 2 January 1776, in *Naval Documents*, III, 572.
3. Details of the commissioning of the three English frigates derive from the various volumes of *Naval Documents*.
4. Kenneth Roberts, ed., *March to Quebec* (New York, 1953), p. 116, Arnold to McNeill, 18 January 1776.
5. *Naval Documents*, III, 1024.
6. *Naval Documents*, III, 1024.
7. See in *The American Neptune* the following articles: M. V. Brewington,



- "The Designs of Our First Frigates," VIII (1948), 7-25, and Howard I. Chapelle, "The Design of the American Frigates of the Revolution and Joshua Humphreys," IX (1949), 161-68.
8. John Langdon to Josiah Bartlett, 26 February 1776, in *Naval Documents*, IV, 79.
  9. Thomas Cushing to John Hancock, 20 January 1776, in *Naval Documents*, III, 875.
  10. Brewington, "The Designs of Our First Frigates," and *Naval Documents*, IV, 124.
  11. *Naval Documents*, IV, 196, 198.
  12. *Naval Documents*, IV, 217f.

### Chapter 3. *Frustration Mounts*

1. *Naval Documents*, IV, 851.
2. McNeill's activities can be partially traced by means of letters reproduced in "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," the various volumes of *Naval Documents*, and several manuscripts illustrated in William A. Baker, *The Boston Marine Society in The American War for Independence* (Boston, 1976).
3. Worthington C. Ford, et al., eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, D. C., 1904-1937), vol. 5.
4. Thomas Cushing to John Hancock, 27 April 1776, in *Naval Documents*, IV, 1282f.
5. John Bradford to John Hancock, 15 May 1776, in *Naval Documents*, V, 102.
6. *Boston Gazette* of 10 June 1776.
7. The convergence of the British frigates is traced through the various volumes of *Naval Documents*.
8. Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen*, II, 491-92, and the Captain's log of H.M. frigate *Flora*, Adm. 51/360, at the Public Record Office, London.
9. Thomas Cushing to Robert Treat Paine, 30 July 1776, in *Naval Documents*, V, 1279.

### Chapter 4. *Thinly Disguised Misgivings*

1. Thomas Cushing to Robert Treat Paine, 9 September 1776, in *Naval Documents*, VI, 755-56.
2. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 25 August 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," p. 115.
3. The Marine Committee to Captains Manley, McNeill, and Thompson, 23 October 1776, in *Naval Documents*, VI, 1385.

4. Hector McNeill to John Bradford, 29 April 1777, in John Bradford Letterbook, Library of Congress.
5. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 25 August 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 116.
6. James Warren to Samuel Adams, 5 July 1778, in *Warren-Adams Letters* (Boston, 1917 and 1925), II, 31.
7. James Warren to Samuel Adams, 25 August 1778, *ibid.*, II, 43.
8. James Warren to Samuel Adams, 2 July 1778, *ibid.*, II, 31.
9. John Paul Jones to Thomas Bell, 15 November 1778, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 138.
10. John Paul Jones to Joseph Hewes, 12 January 1777, in *Naval Documents*, VII, 937-38.
11. John Manley to Hector McNeill, no date but probably January 1777, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, case 5, box 28, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
12. Hector McNeill to Thomas Thompson, 21 July 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 104.
13. James Warren to John Adams, 23 March 1777, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 304f.
14. Dr. Samuel Cooper to John Adams, 3 April 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 51.
15. John Adams to James Warren, 6 April 1777, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 311f.

### Chapter 5. *Foxfire*

1. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 21 May 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," p. 82.
2. Hector McNeill's logbook, kept aboard *Boston* from 21 May-4 July 1777, is at the Mariners Museum, Newport News, Virginia, as also is a log/journal kept by *Boston's* Patrick Conner, 21 May-21 August 1777. A third kept aboard *Boston*, 21 May-21 August, by Benjamin Crowninshield is reproduced in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," pp. 90-99. Conner and Crowninshield obviously copied each others' work in part.
3. Hector McNeill to John Bradford, 13 March 1777, in Baker, *The Boston Marine Society in The American War for Independence*, p. 60 illustration.
4. Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 79, and Massachusetts State Archives, vol. 197, pp. 32-33.
5. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 21 May 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," pp. 82-84.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 80, and Hector McNeill logbook, opposite 22 May 1777. For a fuller analysis of this episode, see Sidney G. Morse, "The Fleet," *The American Neptune*, v, 177-93, who cites Manley's orders to Captain Day.
7. Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen*, II, 519.
8. Caution should be exercised when reading McNeill's timing of events, because he frequently disagrees with other sources. One example here (the time of day *American Tartar* joined the fleet): Conner and Crowninshield—11 A.M.; Ashley Bowen—noon; McNeill—2 P.M.
9. *Somerset's* log at the Public Record Office, London, does not mention the contact.
10. Hector McNeill to Thomas Thompson, 21 July 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," p. 105.
11. Some sources say 6 June; others the seventh. The apparent discrepancy here, as elsewhere, is explained by the fact that some accounts are based on civil time whereas others reflect sea time. The most important time of day aboard a vessel at sea was the meridian passage (noon) when the sun reached its maximum altitude, because it was then that navigational observations were taken to determine the ship's latitude position. The day at sea, therefore, officially ran from noon to noon whereas civil time begins and ends at midnight.
12. Manley's remarks are given in Thomas Hardy's deposition, sworn 11 June 1777, Adm. 1/471, f. 118-20, Enclosure 2, at the Public Record Office, London.
13. *Fox's* movements are traced by means of her Captain's log, Adm. 51/358, at the Public Record Office, London, and by means of the various 1777 issues of *Lloyd's List*.
14. The conversation between Manley and Fotheringham is a composite of the actual words recollected in the 11 June 1777 depositions by Nathaniel Oaks (Fotheringham's coxswain) and Thomas Hardy, Adm. 1/471, f. 116-20, at the Public Record Office, London.
15. Isaac J. Greenwood, *Captain John Manley* (Boston, 1915), p. 96.
16. Hector McNeill to Thomas Thompson, 21 July 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 106.

### Chapter 6. *Signal Hostility*

1. Charles R. Smith, *Marines in the Revolution* (Washington, D. C., 1975), "Journal of William Jennison Lieutenant of Marines," p. 344.
2. These were the sentiments of Captain Alexander McDonald of the Royal Highland Emigrants and of Captain Sir George Collier, R.N.,

- both given in Isaac J. Greenwood, *Captain John Manley* (Boston, 1915), p. 96.
3. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 16 July 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," p. 101.
  4. *Ibid.*
  5. *Ibid.* and McNeill's journal kept aboard *Boston*.
  6. McNeill went aboard Manley to dine on Saturdays, but because the changeover by sea time from Saturday to Sunday took place at noon, dinner was actually served on Sunday.
  7. Hector McNeill to the Marine Committee, 25 August 1777, in Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill . . .," p. 116.
  8. McNeill's journal kept aboard *Boston*.
  9. John Manley to Hector McNeill, 27 June 1777, in the Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, case 5, box 28, at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
  10. Smith, "Journal of William Jennison . . .," p. 345.
  11. Near the present Sydney and Sydney Mines, Cape Breton.

#### Chapter 7. *Perfidy*

1. The principal sources for this chapter are as follows: John Charnock, ed., *Biographica Navalis* (London, 1798), vi, 447-49, 490-94; *The Naval Chronicle for 1814* (London, 1814), xxxii, 274-80; Gardner W. Allen, "Captain Hector McNeill, Continental Navy," Massachusetts Historical Society *Proceedings* (Boston, 1923), lv, 46-152; Charles R. Smith, *Marines in the Revolution* (Washington, D. C., 1975), p. 345; *The Quebec Journal* for 25 September 1777; Patrick Conner's logbook kept on board *Boston*, at the Mariners Museum, Newport News, Virginia; and the following manuscript material at the Public Record Office, London: Captain's log of *Rainbow*, Adm. 51/762; Captain's log of *Flora*, Adm. 51/360; Admiral Lord Howe to Secretary of the Admiralty, 28 August 1777, Adm. 1/487, plus enclosures f. 485, f. 487, f. 497 in particular.

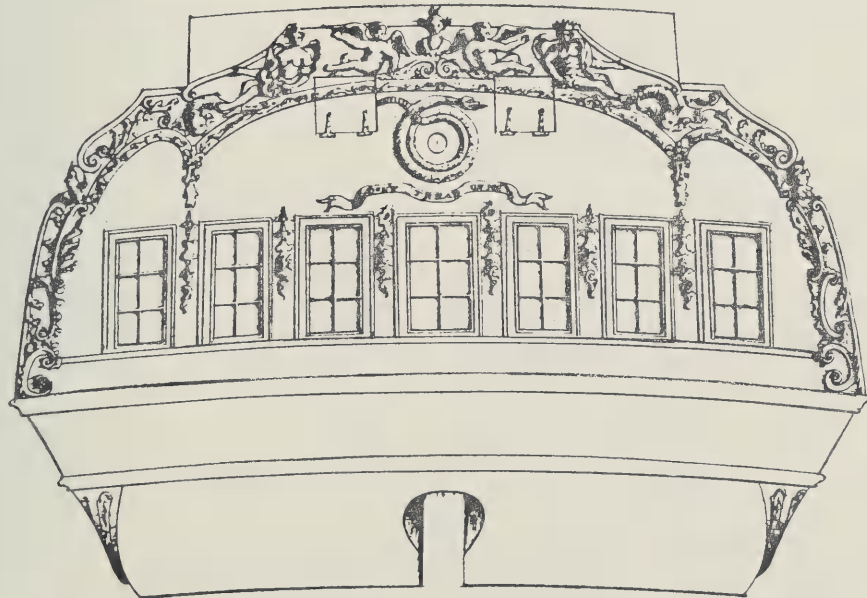
#### Chapter 8. *Recriminations*

1. Alexander Laing, ed., *The Life & Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner* (New York, 1936), p. 50.



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